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SNOWDEN'S
SUNDAY SCHOOL BOOK

By

JAMES H. SNOWDEN

The World a Spiritual System.

Can we Believe in Immortality.

The Coming of the Lord.

Is The World Growing Better?

The Personality of God.

A Wonderful Night.

A Wonderful Morning.

SNOWDEN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL BOOK

PRACTICAL EXPOSITIONS

OF THE INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS, IMPROVED UNIFORM SERIES: COURSE FOR

1922

BY

JAMES H. SNOWDEN

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Set up and electrotyped. Published June, 1921.

Printed in the United States of America

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INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST QUARTER

THE lessons of the First Quarter extend from the disruption of the Hebrew monarchy under Rehoboam and the founding of the northern kingdom of Israel by Jeroboam in B. C. 937 to the downfall of Samaria in B. D. 722. Nineteen kings sat on the throne of Israel during its history, and many of them met a tragic fate.

The arbitrary rule of Solomon's son and successor, Rehoboam, was the occasion of the rebellion against him and division of the monarchy. Its deeper cause was the accumulating burden of taxes and grievances engendered by the royal and priestly establishment at Jerusalem.

The kingdom of Israel rapidly rose into power, but religious apostacy started it on a downward course of corruption and revolutions and assassinations into captivity.

At this period Greece and Rome had not yet appeared above the horizon; and Egypt and Babylon were the two world empires that made Palestine their common attack and battleground.

The teacher should endeavor to grasp the outline of the history of these lessons:

The internal weakness of the Hebrew monarchy, the revolt of the northern tribes under Jeroboam, the new capital at Samaria with its rival idolatrous worship, the critical epoch when Elijah appeared and endeavored to restore the worship of Jehovah, the increasing aggressions of the Syrians and then of the terrible Assyrians, the widening vision of Jehovah's mercy given to Israel through Jonah, the luxury and drunkenness that turned Samaria into a hotbed of iniquity, and the final crash and slaughter that attended the fall of Samaria—these are the high lights in this history, the mountain peaks in its range.

The teacher should have these clearly in mind as the working plan for the quarter, and it would be well to present them to the class and have the scholars grasp them in the beginning of this study.

It is also important that the teacher should endeavor to reproduce the scenes of these lessons and get into their spirit.

These personages are not fictitious characters, like the wooden images and mere dummies that often move across the pages of fiction, but they were real men and women, alive and alert with all the passions and motives that beat in our hearts and move our modern life. We should try to put ourselves in their places and see through their eyes and feel with their emotions.

Like ourselves, they are neither altogether bad nor wholly good, but have mixed natures and motives and act under the play of complex influences. We should judge them fairly according to their light and circumstances and endeavor to extract from their history principles and lessons that apply to ourselves.

The Bible is a wonderfully modern book in that it constantly exhibits the same principles that are at work in our lives and fit into our experiences. We are not to study it with purely antiquarian or historical interest, but for personal application as a means of growth in grace and better living.

THE IMPROVED UNIFORM SERIES COURSE

for 1922

FIRST QUARTER

LATER LEADERS AND PROPHETS OF ISRAEL
(NORTHERN KINGDOM)

(FIRST QUARTER OF A NINE MONTHS' COURSE)

LESSON I.—JANUARY 1

THE REVOLT OF JEROBOAM

Industrial Unrest and Its Cure

Golden Text: Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them. Exodus, 20:4-5.

Devotional Reading: II Samuel, 23:1-7.

Reference Material: I Kings, 11:26-43; 13:7-20:20; II Chron., 12-13; Isaiah, 44:9-20.

Lesson Text: I Kings, 12:12-17, 26-30

12 ¶ So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day.
13 And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him;
14 And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father *also* chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.
15 Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.
16 ¶ So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither *have we* inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.
17 But *as for* the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.

26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David:
27 If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, *even* unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.
28 Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves *of* gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.
29 And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan.
30 And this thing became a sin: for the people went *to worship* before the one, *even* unto Dan.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Petition of the People.
2. An Arrogant Answer.
3. The Kingdom Disrupted.
4. Jeroboam's Fatal Sin.

The increasing burden of taxation to support the splendid establishment built up by David and further enlarged and loaded with still heavier taxation by Solomon resulted in social unrest and rebellion that at length split the kingdom of Israel in two. The division of a country in some instances has good and in other cases has evil consequences. The separation of our own country from England was necessary and good, but its division into a northern republic and a southern confederacy would have been an incalculable evil.

The disruption of the Hebrew monarchy developed the vigorous northern tribes into an independence and strength that they might not otherwise have attained. The northern kingdom soon surpassed the southern in power, though it did not last as long.

The whole story proves that the revolution could have been avoided. Bad statesmanship and arbitrary despotism and growing grievances brought on the final division and downfall.

1. The Petition of the People

The people, through Jeroboam, the son of a widow, of the strong central tribe of Ephraim, who by his ability and ambition had risen to leadership, presented a petition to the new king setting forth their grievances. They recounted the heavy burdens laid upon them by the king's father, asked that these might be lightened, and pledged their loyalty to the new ruler. The

petition was just in its complaints and moderate in its demands, and opened the way for removing evils and binding the nation into unity.

Wise statesmanship would have seized the golden opportunity for adjusting grievances and planting the throne solidly in the hearts of the people.

Rehoboam took three days to consider, which was a wise step. He first counseled with the old men that had been associated with his father, and they gave him the good advice that he should grant the petition of his people and make them his loyal subjects.

This counsel would have saved the nation, but Rehoboam rejected it and next heard the young men. These were a set of fast youth who had grown up in the same circle and atmosphere with Rehoboam, and were full of his arrogance and insolence. They advised him to run the kingdom with a high hand and make his little finger thicker than his father's loins.

2. An Arrogant Answer

The misguided king returned an arrogant answer to the people that precipitated trouble. "When all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king" in words of defiance and disruption. Democracy is already asserting itself among these people and they are ready to throw off the yoke of a king.

Rehoboam played the fool at several points. He showed his lack of judgment in the advice he followed. He had no more discernment than to reject the counsel of his experienced and constitutional advisers, whose proposal would have quieted social discontent and nipped rebellion in the bud, and follow the foolish advice of his hot-headed and dissolute companions whose counsel swept the kingdom on the rocks of ruin.

Many a young man shows Rehoboam's arrogance in disdaining the teachings of his father and mother which his better judgment approves and adopting the counsel of ungodly companions out of sheer willfulness.

Rehoboam further showed his short-sighted judgment in supposing that he could spurn the petitions and trample upon the rights of his people with impunity.

In dealing with others, especially those that are in any way subject to us, we should be on our guard against an unjust and tyran-

nical spirit and should be so fair and patient and sympathetic that we may win the loyalty of others and make our very enemies friends.

Conciliation will often adjust industrial grievances, whereas a haughty and oppressive spirit on the part of capital towards labor or unreasonable and rash demands of labor upon capital will strain the social order to the point of disruption.

The same spirit among nations will break the peace of the world.

3. The Kingdom Disrupted

The rash answer of the king exasperated the people and raised the cry of revolt, "What portion have we in David? to your tents, O Israel!" That was a fatal day in Israel which cast its shadow down through many centuries of strife. The nation was cleft in two right across its rocky backbone. The kingdom was fissured from east to west, and north and south fell apart, ten tribes in the north, and two tribes in the south. On that little strip of sea-coast, not larger than some of our western counties, henceforth two kingdoms stand facing each other, sometimes in friendly relations and sometimes in bloody strife.

The people of Israel had just grievances. Judah was the seat of government and art and culture, and the rough mountaineers of the north were growing suspicious and restless under its dominance; they were taxed terribly to keep up that splendid establishment in Jerusalem, and Rehoboam's insulting answer was the spark that exploded their slumbering wrath.

Yet they were too precipitous and were probably wrong in their rebellion. The splitting of the nation into hostile fragments was such a tremendous, far-reaching disaster as should have given its authors pause. It weakened and wasted the energies of the race, sowed it with bitterness and passion, and unloaded a terrible burden of evil on coming generations. Patience and loyalty might have found a way out and saved the unity of the nation, too.

It is wise to bear with even great evils rather than to bring on a greater evil still.

The temptation is often strong with us to resort to violent measures in adjusting grievances. It frequently happens that families, churches, States are disrupted because dissatisfied members have not the patience to bear and wait. Unity is so great a good, the necessary basis of so many blessings, that we should sacrifice and suffer much in order that we may maintain it.

Rehoboam, now realizing that his kingdom was breaking, took measures to retrieve the situation. He sent his chief tax collector with fair words about reduced burdens to appease the people. But they simply stoned him to death. A moderate concession made in time would have averted disaster, but now it was too late, and the kingdom broke in two and each part went its own fateful way.

Many a man tries to save his kingdom when it is gone beyond recall. The youth who rejects the teachings and example of Christain parents and walks in the counsel of the ungodly and sits in the seat of the scornful, who thinks he is smart enough to break the laws of life with impunity, will some day try in vain to save a kingdom of his that cannot be recovered with strong crying and tears.

4. Jeroboam's Fatal Sin

Israel, having rejected Rehoboam, now rallied around Jeroboam. He was a man who as a youth had attracted the attention of Solomon by his splendid ability as a worker and organizer and he had risen on the arduous steps of deeds done. He quickly enlarged and fortified Shechem as his capital and also built defenses across the Jordan. He did not sit down and enjoy his his ease when he had obtained a kingdom, but employed the same enterprise and energy that had brought him his great estate in building it up in strength and security.

Having built his capital he gave his attention to another matter. A danger began to loom up on his southern horizon. Jerusalem continued to be the central seat of worship whither all the tribes went up to the three great yearly feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Would not this central worship prove an attraction that would finally draw the northern back into union with the southern kingdom? Could Shechem withstand this steady gravitation towards Jerusalem?

Jeroboam thought upon this thing and resolved upon a bold step. Why not set up an independent system of worship in his own kingdom and capital? Were there not sacred cities in Israel as well as in Judah? Could they not produce religion of as high authority and good quality at home without importing it from a rival kingdom?

No sooner did this daring thought seize Jeroboam than it was done. The king set up two golden calves and exclaimed, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel!" This was a masterly appeal to

the provincial patriotism and pride of his people, and it led them straight into idolatry. "And this thing became a sin."

Of course it did, for it was sin in its root and therefore it became a sin in all its fruits.

Jeroboam thought that the religion of his kingdom imperiled its integrity and he deliberately subordinated and sacrificed religion to politics. Religion stood in the way of politics, and therefore it was put out of the way. Idolatry turned all ancient religion into lust, and only by the most desperate surgery could Israel be saved from it.

Whenever we put anything in the place of God, whether it be gold calves or gold dollars, it will degrade all our higher life and sink us into the pit.

This sin of Jeroboam sent a stream of corruption down through all the succeeding history of Israel and finally sent it into captivity.

No one can shut his sin up in his own life but sends it down as a blighting influence into the lives of others.

This lesson and all these lessons show that the problems of political and social disturbance and industrial unrest and their cure are the same in principle in every age. The causes and complaints leading to the disruption of the Hebrew monarchy have a strikingly modern aspect and sound. Oppression and haughtiness in high places inevitably breed unrest and revolt in lower levels and revolt ripens into revolution.

The way to deal with such social and industrial conditions is not high-minded arbitrariness or attempted suppression. This will only increase the pent-up pressure until it reaches the point of explosion.

The democratic spirit was working among these Hebrew tribes, and the cure for raw and revolting democracy is not autocratic despotism but more democracy; a spirit of conference and conciliation on the basis of mutual interest and brotherly good will.

This spirit is broadening in our modern life, and it contains the promise and potency of solving our political and social and industrial problems and thereby helping to bring the kingdom of God into the world.

LESSON II.—JANUARY 8

ELIJAH THE TISHBITE

Obeying the Word of Jehovah

Golden Text: But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Matt. 6:33.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 62:1–8.

Reference Material: Exodus, 16; I Kings, 16:29–33; Matt. 6:19–34.

Lesson Text: I Kings, 17:1–16

1 ¶ And Elijah the Tishbite, *who was* of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, *As* the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

2 And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,

3 Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan.

4 And it shall be, *that* thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.

5 So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan.

6 And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

7 And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

8 ¶ And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying,

9 Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which *belongeth* to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman *was* there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

11 And as she was going to fetch *it*, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

12 And she said, *As* the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I *am* gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go *and* do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring *it* unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

14 For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day *that* the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.

15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat *many* days.

16 *And* the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***Elijah the Prophet of Judgment.***
2. ***The Prophet Protected in the Famine.***
3. ***The Prophet Caught in His Own Scourge.***
4. ***The Prophet Saved by a Heathen Woman.***

From the division of the kingdom of Israel flow two foul streams of history. Revolution succeeded revolution, often by the assassin's dagger, in both kingdoms. Jeroboam's sin of idolatry, "wherewith he made Israel to sin," became hereditary in the northern kingdom and rolled its vile tides down through many generations. Jeroboam, Nadab (killed in battle), Baasha, Elah (assassinated while drunk), Zimri (committed suicide), Omri, are the names of the kings that bring us to Ahab, about seventy years after the division.

Ahab was the most brilliant and the wickedest king that ever sat upon the throne of Israel. He was an able and daring ruler, who won great victories and built his kingdom up in power. But he was a moral degenerate and plunged the nation into deeper corruption than it had ever reached before. He married Jezebel, one of the wickedest women of the world, the Catherine de Medici of eastern story, a daughter of the king of Zidon and a worshiper of Baal. Ahab introduced this unspeakable immorality into his kingdom and built a temple to Baal in his own capital.

Out of this dark cloud of guilt God shot a stroke of lightning.

1. Elijah the Prophet of Judgment

Elijah was the bolt of fire that God let loose upon Ahab and idolatrous Israel. He starts forth upon the page of history sudden and terrible as a lightning flash. "Elijah the Tishbite, who was a sojourner in Gilead," is the brief biography with which he is introduced. "Elijah" means "Jehovah is my God"—a name that fit him like a glove. He was from the wild mountainous region of Gilead and partook of its rough and daring spirit, its weird and romantic character. He was a "sojourner," not a settled inhabitant, but a roving nomad, living on the borderland of Arabia, and an Arab in spirit himself, darting hither and thither like a flashing messenger of the sky.

"Elijah was well named, 'the grandest and most romantic character that Israel ever produced.' Certainly there is no personage in the Old Testament whose career is more vividly portrayed, or who exercises on us a more remark-

able fascination. His rare, sudden, and brief appearances, his undaunted courage, and fiery zeal, the brilliancy of his triumphs, the pathos of his despondency, the glory of his departure, and the calm beauty of his reappearance on the Mount of Transfiguration, throw such a halo of brightness around him as is equaled by none of his compeers in sacred story."

Suddenly issuing from the eastern desert and standing before the corrupt king in the splendor of his court, the stern prophet boldly said, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be rain nor dew these years, but according to my word."

Physical pain is here made the penalty of spiritual evil. This principle starts in the home and runs out along all the lines of discipline and is built into the foundation of all government. It is the same whip, wielded by the divine hand, that is applied to the discipline of nations. While drought and famine, earthquake and fire and flood, are not always to be interpreted as judgments for sin, and we must be careful not to infer the guilt of men on whom natural disasters fall (Luke, 13:4), yet all events are in God's hand, and famine and pestilence and war are mighty flails with which he may thresh guilty nations. All nature is an arsenal of weapons, and its shotted guns and sheathed swords wait to do his bidding. He need only dissipate the unseen raindrops in the clouds and blow the dew off the grass, and nature will become withered and scorched into a desert.

All nature is alive and electric with spiritual energies—it is simply the glove on God's hand. Its touch is not always of velvety softness, but at times it can strike crushing blows. Human sin may become so thickened and hardened that only the terrible swift sword of the Lord can pierce through it. Nations, kings, individuals may become so saturated with sin that only fire can cleanse them.

Divine mercy never annuls divine justice, and it must ever be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God.

2. The Prophet Protected in the Famine

Famine stalked through the doomed land, king and people were soon in the grip of its fleshless hands, and one wild cry of distress went up from every home.

But Elijah himself was spared and sheltered. In one of the deep gorges

that cut down into the Jordan valley the Lord hid his prophet as in the hollow of his hand. A mountain brook rippled by him in a cool stream, and the ravens, great birds of prey, brought him food.

The same agencies of nature that are punishment and destruction to the wicked may at the same time protect and nourish the righteous. God is not only standing within the fateful shadow of retribution and shooting the lightnings of his wrath, but he is also keeping watch above his own.

Streams stealing down through mountain ravines will find his saints, birds will become angels to minister to his people. In the time of famine, whatever may be the lack of material bread, there is still plenty of spiritual food for faithful souls. The dews of divine grace never evaporate, the bread of heaven is always found in abundance.

The Lord will provide: trust him and run to the shelter of his Word. "For in the time of trouble, he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock."

This forced retirement was not a period of useless idleness in the prophet's life. That mountain gorge was a place of undisturbed serenity and meditation and communion with God. In that silence he heard the still small voice of the Spirit and gathered spiritual energy for coming conflicts.

It is the men who bury their roots deep in solitude and silence that tower strong and staunch in the storm. Beware of the man that hides himself from the crowd, far away in the mountains with God, as Jesus went into the mountain to pray: when he comes forth he shall stand before kings.

3. The Prophet Caught in His Own Scourge

The drouth continued and grew in intensity and began searching with panting breath for water, tracking every stream to its source, penetrating every mountain recess, and licking up every smallest rivulet with its parched lips. At length the devouring monster came upon Elijah's brook and drank it dry.

The prophet was caught in the coils of his own scourge. The famine that

he had flung as the judgment of God over the guilty land had fallen upon himself. His own lips panted for the water he had taken from others. Saving the nation from the nation's sin had involved him in the nation's suffering.

Does this contradict the lesson just learned that God is mindful of his own? No, but truth is complex and has many sides that may seem at variance with one another.

God may save his people in famine, and yet not save them from famine.

Saving others always involves us in some degree in their condition. The mother must suffer with the suffering child, and the father with the wandering boy. The physician may catch the very disease he comes to cure. The reformer will bring upon himself persecution and slander from the evil he tries to remove. Jesus bore his own cross. He could not come into the world to save it without bringing upon himself the burden of the world's sin. His own brook dried up and he was caught in the agony of thirst.

No one can help the suffering who is unwilling to suffer himself. Some part of the burden of sin must rest upon our shoulders, or it will never be lifted off this world.

Put not your trust in any earthly stream, for sooner or later it may run dry. However safely you may think it hidden deep in a mountain gorge, the famine will find it. There is a river the streams whereof shall never fail and shall make glad the city of God. Whosoever drinketh of this water shall never thirst.

4. The Prophet Saved by a Heathen Woman

The prophet's brook dried up, but the prophet himself was not left to perish. The believer may come to a dire extremity, but behind his last crumb of bread and drop of water he will find God.

Elijah was bidden to arise and go beyond the borders of his own country up along the north coast of the Mediterranean to a heathen city, Zarephath, under the shadow of Zidon, whence the terrible Jezebel had come.

Why that far flight into a foreign land and into the very lair of the fierce and furious she-wolf that was the plague and terror of Israel? The prophet could easily have raised strong and seemingly insuperable objections to such a course. But "he arose and went to Zarephath." All of these Bible heroes are marked by this characteristic of unfailing, unquestioning obedience.

We have here an illustration of the complex interworkings of Providence, for God brought Elijah to Zarephath that his life might be spared by a heathen woman. He saw her gathering sticks and asked her for a drink of water. The hospitable woman was going to bring it when the prophet asked for bread also.

Then the woman was forced to tell her pitiful story. She had meal for only one cake for herself and her son and then—death. The prophet told her to fear not, but to make a cake and bring it to him first and promised that the meal should not fail. "And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah." Unquestioning obedience again, growing out of childlike trust. This pagan woman could not have had much light, but she followed the gleam she had until it led her into the full morning. Was it not on this same shore that a Canaanitish woman astonished Jesus with her faith? What was there in the soil of this heathen coast that it grew such beautiful wild flowers of faith?

Verily the Spirit of God must shine everywhere, and in multitudes of hearts far out in the heathen world there must be seeds of faith that shall come to blossom.

"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord." The same power was at work here that on the shore of the Galilean lake multiplied five loaves and two fishes until they fed five thousand men. There is bread of earth that perishes with the using, but there is a bread of heaven that never wastes away but grows with use.

Using our faith never uses it up; the more we use it the more of it we shall have until it fills the heart and overflows into other lives.

Sharing our good things with others does not divide but multiplies them, so that the more we give the more we have.

The grace of God can never fail, and they that eat of this bread shall never hunger.

"According to the word of the Lord": all things come to pass according to his word, and the secret of success is obedience to his word and will.

LESSON III.—JANUARY 15

ELIJAH'S CHALLENGE OF BAAL WORSHIP

Modern Evils: How to Fight Them

Golden Text: This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. I John, 5:4.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 2:1–3, 7–12.

Reference Material: Joshua, 24:14–28; Eph. 6:10–20.

Lesson Text: I Kings, 18:20–24, 30, 36–39

20 So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.

21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

22 Then said Elijah unto the people, I, *even* I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets *are* four hundred and fifty men.

23 Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under;* and I will dress the other bullock, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under;*

24 And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.

30 And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD *that was* broken down.

36 And it came to pass at *the time of* the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou *art* God in Israel, and *that* I *am* thy servant, and *that* I have done all these things at thy word.

37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou *art* the LORD God, and *that* thou hast turned their heart back again.

38 Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and locked up the water that *was* in the trench.

39 And when all the people saw *it,* they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he *is* the God; the LORD, he *is* the God.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***The Failure of the False Prophets.***
2. ***Elijah's Preparations.***
3. ***Elijah's Prayer.***
4. ***Fire from Heaven.***
5. ***A Tragic Ending of the Trial.***

On Carmel's crown now swarms a countless throng,
With one brave soul to stand 'gainst millions in the wrong.

Three years had passed and the drouth had burned the land to a desert and the people were in the last extremity of distress.

The time had come to strike a decisive blow for the abolishment of idolatry and the restoration of the true worship of Jehovah. The fruit of the famine was to be reaped in a great harvest of faith.

1. The Failure of the False Prophets

Elijah was ordered out of his retreat into active service. The prophet met the king and repelled the charge of being the troubler of Israel by boldly branding this guilt on Ahab himself. Elijah now proposed to Ahab a trial of the relative truth and power of the worship of Baal and the worship of Jehovah. The four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were to place a bullock on an altar and pray to their god for fire to consume it, and Elijah was to do the same: "and the god that answereth by fire, let him be god." This test was in accordance with the ideas of the age, and was fair and conclusive.

The central mountain range that runs through Palestine like a spinal column, when it comes to the plain of Esdraelon, turns to the northwest, plunges seaward and buries its rocky roots in the blue Mediterranean. On the top of this giant altar the grand trial took place. The summit at one point is a broad plateau, in full view on every side of distant portions of the land, and is set in a mighty frame of mountain, plain and sea, a vast theater apparently built for just such a solemn and momentous spectacle. Close to its base flows the Kishon, and on its slope is a mountain pool that persists through the severest drouth.

On the appointed day a great multitude assembled, and the trial was on. The prophets of Baal built their pile of wood, put their bullock upon it and began to call upon their god. All day long they cried ceaselessly and in their frenzy leaped and cut themselves with knives, while Elijah mocked them and with keen irony taunted their helpless god. No answer came; the heavens had no tongue of flame for such faith.

False religions have been given full time and opportunity to show what they can do. Where is the country they have cleansed and uplifted, the souls they have sanctified, the fire they have drawn from heaven? Has materialism, or agnosticism, or any form of

skepticism any worthy fruits to show? Superstition and unbelief have no divine fire that can burn away a single sin.

2. Elijah's Preparation

Elijah's time was now come, the sun was westering and its level rays glowed on Carmel's crown. The false prophets ceased their clamorous cries, a hush fell upon the multitude and Elijah spoke. He called upon the people to come near, and the circle of the throng pressed closer. He then repaired the altar of the Lord that was thrown down, probably one of the altars of Jehovah destroyed by Jezebel.

Repairing the altar of the Lord is a good way to begin reform. The nation that has forgotten God must take its first right step by returning to his altar. A weakened and distracted church may find the cause of its trouble in a fallen altar. A neglected family altar is the root of the weakness and the worldliness of many a Christian home. Repair your altar and make it strong and beautiful in the worship of the Lord.

In rebuilding the altar Elijah took twelve stones, symbolizing the twelve tribes to whom God had given the name Israel. This act was a silent but powerful appeal to the unity of the nation that lay deeper and broader than the unhappy division of the tribes. In this supreme trial the prophet would have the disrupted nation unified in the worship of its true God. This appeal would touch a deep rich chord in the hearts of the people, and wake the music of the olden days and ancient glory.

In repairing a fallen altar, be sure that you also repair broken fellowships and strained relations. Heal your divisions and strifes at the altar and be of one mind. A family or church can worship better at an altar in which every member is represented by a stone or other symbol.

Elijah dug a trench around the altar, put wood on the stones and a bullock on the wood, and then poured jar after jar of water over it all until it was drenched and saturated and the trench was full. Why was this? To shut out the possibility of deception and fraud, which were frequently practiced in connection with such affairs. Elijah would show the people beyond doubt that there was no cheat in it, and that the fire came from heaven, not from earth.

Christianity was not originated in a corner, but in the open day. It has no cunningly devised fables and clever tricks with which to deceive the world, but it blazons its reality in many infallible proofs and its central miracle of the resurrection of its Lord was enacted in the light of the fullest publicity.

3. Elijah's Prayer

All things were now ready and Elijah made his appeal to his God. At the time of the evening sacrifice the prophet drew near and said: "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again." This is one of the sublimest prayers in the Bible, inspired in its logic and language, concentrated and definite in its aim, pure in its purpose and mighty in its appeal and power. After the insensate cries of the false prophets, it must have fallen upon the silent and awed multitude like a solemn, majestic strain of music, awakening thoughts and memories too deep for tears. In appealing to the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel," he aroused the national consciousness of the past and set these potent personages to praying with him; all the mighty dead crowded their supplications into this cry.

In our prayers we appeal to the " God of our fathers," and thereby take our stand upon his faithfulness to past generations, and thus we turn all the voices of the dead and all the centuries of Christian history into one mighty prayer.

Elijah's prayer was definite and pointed in its aim. Our prayers are often split into too many petitions and wander around in aimless vagueness. We do not pray as we ought, because we do not know what we want and still less what we need. The prophet had an intense consciousness of one need and concentrated his purpose and prayer into one petition. His one petition was that God should be glorified in making Israel to know him as their God, and Elijah as his servant, and in turning the heart of the people back to himself.

There was nothing selfish, small and short-lived in this prayer, but it was cast upon large lines and looked straight away from human selfishness and vanity to divine glory manifesting itself in human blessing. Our prayers should not seize upon petty personal

points, but lay hold of large things and aim at divine ideals, and then we may pray with a prophet's passion and power.

4. Fire from Heaven

As lightning out of a cloudless sky fell the fire from heaven and burnt up the offering and the wood, cracked and pulverized the stones and licked up the water and the very dust out of the trench. The miracle had an overpowering effect upon the people, who fell upon their knees and cried, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God." This miraculous answer to prayer becomes natural and easy of belief when it is set in the frame of its great national environment and grand spiritual purpose. A great crisis in the history of the chosen people called for and justified an extraordinary manifestation of the divine presence and power in order to save them and through them save the world from the degradation of sensual idolatry. Thus fell the immoral and shameless worship of a heathen god in Israel and thus the chosen people were recovered to the true and pure worship.

Nothing else goes so deep into the life of a nation as its religion, and it either lifts them towards holiness or sinks them into the flesh. Christianity has its mighty works that attest its divine origin, and its Lord is declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead. It has its fire from heaven that has power to cleanse everything it touches into the beauty of holiness.

5. A Tragic Ending of the Trial

The great trial had a tragic ending. At Elijah's command the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were seized and hurried down to the plain, and the Kishon was crimsoned with their blood; not one of them escaped.

Is this the way to deal with false prophets? Not in our day. Our lines are fallen in a more advanced stage of moral development when rational measures are sufficient and more efficient. We may now wield only the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of truth for the overthrow of error. Death for heresy has had its day, and our victories are now spiritual and not carnal. Elijah was a prophet of his age and could not rise far above its level.

In his day, also, coarser and more radical measures may have been necessary. Idolatry was a dreadful cancer in Israel that had to be cut out with

a knife, or it would have saturated and poisoned the whole body unto death. These false prophets were unclean devils that Elijah thought should be exterminated. He believed it was necessary that they should die in order that Israel might live as a nation and propagate true religion in the world. All false prophets and impenitent souls incur guilt that must result in retribution; for the universe is organized in the interest of righteousness and against evil, and it is written in the very laws of life that the soul that sinneth shall die; and this spiritual death is deeper and more fearful than the physical death of the body.

But we still have false prophets and some of them are as unclean in their doctrines and deeds as the prophets of Baal. They swarm in heathen countries and infest Christian lands and especially cities and they imperil our morals and religion and our whole social fabric. Shallow and foolish people that are ready to run after every self-styled prophet are especially susceptible to their wiles.

We also have the great vices and cancers in our Christian civilization which we must ever fight as we should fight the very devil himself. We must put on the whole armor of God against these evils and quit ourselves in this battle like men and good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

LESSON IV.—JANUARY 22

ELIJAH'S FLIGHT AND RETURN

Finding and Finishing Our Task

Golden Text: I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. Psalm, 40:1.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 42:6–11.

Reference Material: Ezek. 2:1–7; Acts, 16:6–10; 18:1–11.

Lesson Text: I Kings, 19:9–18

9 ¶ And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?

10 And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

11 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake:

12 And after the earthquake a fire; *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

13 And it was *so*, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, *there came* a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?

14 And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

15 And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael *to be* king over Syria:

16 And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint *to be* king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint *to be* prophet in thy room.

17 And it shall come to pass, *that* him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.

18 Yet I have left *me* seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***A Panic-stricken Prophet.***
2. ***A Despondent Prophet.***
3. ***Wind, Earthquake and Fire.***
4. ***A Prophet Sent Back to His Work.***
5. ***More Good in the World Than We Know.***

Elijah's triumph on Carmel was followed by swift reaction.

In answer to the prophet's prayer the drouth was broken in drenching rain. Ahab was bidden to return in haste lest he be overtaken by the storm, while Elijah, fleet as an Arab, ran as a courier before him. Arrived at the palace, Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and how he had slain all the prophets of Baal with the sword.

The king was a weaker character than his wicked wife and did not know what action to take in the affair until he had consulted her. Jezebel knew. The tigress flew into a passion of rage at the news and swore that she would have Elijah's life within twenty-four hours.

1. A Panic-stricken Prophet

This message threw the prophet into a panic of fear, and, taking his servant, he started on a run down through Israel and Judah and never stopped until he got to Beersheba on the edge of the desert, a hundred miles away. The brave prophet of the Lord who had boldly defied Ahab and had dared to stand single-handed against a hostile throng on Carmel now collapsed and fled affrighted at the word of a woman! Should he not have endeavored to rally his forces and secure the fruits of his victory in recovering Israel from its apostasy?

The greatest opportunity of his life was now before him. But when the crisis of duty and danger came, he did not trust God to carry him through, but deserted his post and escaped as a fugitive into the wilderness. Yet all the powers, physical and spiritual, of the prophet had been strained far beyond the ordinary range of human endurance, and it is no wonder that at last the tense cords snapped.

2. A Despondent Prophet

Forty days' further flight brought Elijah to Horeb, the mount of God, where in the solitude and silence of a cave he heard the divine voice asking, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

There is a slight tone of surprise and implied reproof in this question, as though the prophet were out of his place and needed to give account of himself.

Elijah answered that he had been very jealous for the Lord, whose altars the children of Israel had thrown down and whose prophets they had slain, ending with the pathetic plaint, "and I, even I only, am left."

We have here a deeper cause of Elijah's despondency than his physical exhaustion: he was laboring under a sense of disappointment, defeat and loneliness. He had expected to accomplish a great revolution and reform in Israel. Patiently he had waited through the famine and boldly had he faced Ahab. On Carmel he had won a startling triumph. Now he thought the hour was come when the people would forsake idolatry and go back to the worship of Jehovah. But suddenly the tide turned and all was lost in defeat and flight. In the depth of his despair the last star of hope was blotted out and he thought he was the only good man left; and he would soon be gone. The prophet projected abroad his own inner gloom over Israel and then saw it wrapped in thick darkness. His own flight loomed up as God's failure.

Disappointment and defeat after an initial success are particularly hard upon our faith and hope. In such a state we are apt to see all things through our own gloom. We begin to suspect the faith and faithfulness of others and take pessimistic views of the church and the world. Really, good men are few; and to be perfectly frank, there is only about one left! Such views are subjective and are only the shadows cast by our own melancholy minds. Stop thinking that way and such depression vanishes.

3. Wind, Earthquake, and Fire

This complaint drew from Jehovah a sublime answer.

A mighty wind shivered the rocks, an earthquake shook the solid mountain, and the lightnings flashed and blazed. These were the outriders of God's power and majesty, but they were not God. Then there was "a still small voice." And Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle and stood in reverent waiting.

What was the meaning of this tremendous manifestation? One meaning was that God was still alive and had lost none of his power. Elijah in his despair had forgotten this and had acted as though God were dead. Jehovah let loose his mighty Arm and smote right and left about Elijah, and falling mountain walls and blazing bolts of fire proved to the prophet that God still reigned. This is a central truth that we need to keep alive in our minds and hearts.

Despondency may have its root in doubt. We lose a vivid sense of God's presence and power and then we begin to fear that the world is falling to pieces. Because we are defeated we think God

has failed. But the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, and tottering mountains and burning suns attest his power to do his pleasure.

A further meaning in this display was that God does not best work through violent forces but through gentle influences. Elijah had trusted to fire and sword to cleanse the land of idolatry and reform the people. A temporary victory was thus accomplished, but no radical and permanent reformation. God intimated to him that softer and slower measures must be used. Reason's voice must be heard and conscience must be convinced. The stillest forces are ever the mightiest. A hammer can shiver ice into a thousand pieces, but every piece is still ice. Only the gentle sunshine can melt it into sweet water. The lightning's flash and roar are only an infinitesimal fraction of the immeasurable electric energy that lies invisible and silent in the air and is always working beneficent results.

We would like to grasp the lightning with which to destroy evil and establish the kingdom of God. We are impatient to seize the sword and cut matters short in righteousness. But few are the questions that the sword can settle. It can kill the body but it cannot convince the mind. The great war has changed few minds anywhere in the world. Powder can blow up a fort, but it cannot win a convert. Jesus told his disciple to put up his sword, and not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit speaking in the gentlest voice are the grandest victories won.

4. A Prophet Sent Back to His Work

Again the question was put to Elijah, what he was doing there, and again he uttered his complaint of defeat and failure. The Lord answered him this time, "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria."

This throws further light into the cause of Elijah's despondency. One of its roots was his idleness as the result of his desertion of his post of duty. He had been engaged in urgent and exciting work in Israel, running hither and thither with the swiftness of a nomad, meeting great issues and winning great victories. Suddenly he let go of his work and fled into the desert where he had nothing to do but to brood over his failure. His restless spirit could not lie in idleness and life become a burden to him from its very emptiness. He would rather die than do nothing.

" Get back to your work," was God's pedagogic command to Elijah. This was an effective cure for the prophet, for after his return to his work we hear no more of his despondency. Never again did he think he was the only good man left and say he wanted to die.

Inactivity may often be a cause of despondency with us. Idleness is emptiness that is full of the devil. Our faculties are hungering for action, and vigorous exercise will send joy into our hearts. Idle people are generally the most discontented people, and many a person is simply eating his own heart out in morbid despondency because he has nothing to do. Whenever you find yourself sitting idle and discouraged hear God's command " Get back to your work of lending a hand." Get out of your selfish inner stagnation into outer usefulness, and the sunshine will break through your cloud.

Teach some child, and you may anoint some coming great one. The earnest active Christian, always doing something for the Master, is rarely despondent.

5. *More Good in the World Than We Know*

Elijah prayed that he might die, and this prayer was forgotten by the Lord, but his passing was foreshadowed in the command, "and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room." There was one man left in Israel good enough in God's estimation to become his successor.

Another flash of light was also thrown upon the pessimistic complaint of Elijah that he was the only faithful prophet and good man left in Israel. With a touch of gentle irony Jehovah said to him: "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." Seven thousand faithful souls that Elijah in his blindness had not counted when he thought he was the only true worshiper! Seven thousand had been sustained by his heroic faith, so much wider was his unconscious influence than he himself knew!

Is it not even so with our pessimistic views of the world? At times we are disposed to think that all things are degenerating in business, government, religion. The world has just been wrecked in the greatest war of history and it appears to have carried down all things in its cataclysm. The church has been weakened and piety is on the decline. " When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? "

Yes. The faithful in all lands are more in number than we know, and the purpose of God is ever increasing with the process of the suns. "Why are thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Everyone's unconscious influence is wider than he knows or ever dreams. When Carlyle finished the first volume of the "French Revolution" he loaned the manuscript to a friend who sat reading it far into the night and left it lying on the table, where the next morning a housemaid found the loose mass of paper, and she kindled the fire with it so that it went up in flames, like the French Revolution itself. When Carlyle was told the fatal news he sat for days in despondency and despair. One morning sitting at his window he saw out over acres of London roofs a bricklayer at work, tapping each brick affectionately with his trowel and singing blithe as a lark. "Poor fool," said Carlyle to himself, "how canst thou be so happy with all things rushing into the inane?" Then he bethought himself and said, "Poor fool thou, rather, who sittest here whining and complaining." Then he arose and washed and felt himself anointed and went back to his work, and the "French Revolution" got finished again.

That humble London bricklayer never knew that he helped to write that great book, and we may never know how widely our example and influence reach out and help other lives, even as Elijah unknown to himself helped to sustain seven thousand souls in Israel.

LESSON V.—JANUARY 29

ELIJAH IN NABOTH'S VINEYARD

Respecting the Rights of Others

Golden Text: Be sure your sin will find you out. Num. 32:23.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 43:1–5.

Reference Material: Lev. 25:23–28; Amos, 8:4–10; Micah, 3:1–4.

Lesson Text: I Kings, 21:7–10, 16–20

7 And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, *and* eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.
8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed *them* with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that *were* in his city, dwelling with Naboth.
9 And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people:
10 And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And *then* carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.

16 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.
17 ¶ And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,
18 Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which *is* in Samaria: behold, *he is* in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it.
19 And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.
20 And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found *thee:* because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. A Discontented King.
2. A Wicked Wife.
3. An Infamous Plot.
4. An Iniquitous Triumph.
5. A Dreadful Doom.

We here have a glimpse into the private life of Ahab, and it matches his public life, revealing its hidden root of unrestrained selfishness and wickedness.

Ahab had a royal palace at Jezreel on Mount Gilboa overlooking the pic-

turesque valley of Esdraelon. Adjoining his estate was the vineyard of a Jewish peasant, Naboth. Ahab wanted this land to enlarge his pleasure grounds and to convert it into a flower garden. He offered Nabob a better vineyard elsewhere or a liberal price for it. Naboth declined to sell the inheritance of his fathers at any price. Possibly he regarded such a sale as contrary to law (Numbers, 36:7) and refused on religious grounds; at any rate, the paternal estate was dear to him as the old homestead, it suited him, and he was unwilling to remove. So far the negotiation was honest and fair. Ahab had a right to desire to get the land and to offer to buy it, and Naboth had a right to desire to keep the land and to refuse to sell it.

But two men wanted the same thing, and this is the root of most of the strife of the world.

1. A Discontented King

At this point trouble begins. Ahab went home from his fruitless interview with Naboth in a sullen mood, threw himself on his bed in a fit of sulks, turned his face to the wall, and refused to eat. A fine condition for a king to be in and all because he could not get possession of the little property of one of the meanest of his subjects! All he could see out of his palace window was that peasant's vineyard. He was blind to the magnificent scenery of the Esdraelon valley and the surrounding mountains because that small piece of ground lying under his casement inflamed his eyes and embittered his soul. All his royal estates and palaces, all his dignity and power as king, the whole length and breadth of his kingdom could not make him happy as long as he lacked that bit of land.

To this depth of misery can covetousness and discontent bring us. Contentment consists in looking on the things we have and appreciating and developing and enjoying them, and discontent grows out of looking on the things we do not have and inordinately desiring them. Contentment is not a matter of wealth and large possessions, for the rich experience as much discontent as the poor; and the king may be the most miserable man in his own kingdom.

Covetousness is desire uncontrolled by conscience. Beware of such desire: it contains in itself the seeds of every unholy passion and lawless deed.

2. A Wicked Wife

Jezebel came in and found Ahab sulking on his bed. She inquired what was the matter, and Ahab told her his story of disappointment at the hand of a peasant. The proud queen's lip curled in fine scorn and contempt at the sight of such a king. Did he really rule the kingdom of Israel? Then why should he lie there in churlish petulance and impotence, like a simpering fool? Let him get up and eat and be merry. She will show him how to get that vineyard! Naboth the Jezreelite shall be an obstruction slight as a spider's thread to her imperious will.

The striking feature of her character in this transaction is her utter lack of conscience. She was wholly blind to any element of right or wrong in the matter. All she saw was that Naboth had a vineyard which Ahab wanted: the only thing to do was to take it; what was he whimpering about?

There is a great deal of this kind of blindness in the world. When men see others have things they want, the question of right or wrong often becomes secondary and may be wholly crowded out of view. Might is generally believed to make right among nations, and many a man acts on the same principle. It is hard to look justly and dispassionately when we are looking at something others have and we want. This is a principle that goes deep into our personal relations and into the business world and into the whole social order.

Ahab was dragged into his wickedness by his wife. He had some little conscience which she contemptuously canceled and then she ruthlessly snatched the coveted prize.

Is not many a business man driven into speculation and embezzlement because he has in his home a devotee of fashion who is ever imperiously demanding more money? Has not many a husband been enmeshed in his wife's laces and strangled by her ribbons? An ambitious, selfish spirit in the home may reach out and work sad ruin in the world.

3. An Infamous Plot

Jezebel set her cunning wits to work and soon compassed her wicked end. She wrote letters stamped with the king's seal to the elders or authorities of

Jezreel explaining and enjoining her plan. They were to begin well by proclaiming a fast—religion was to cloak this crime in sanctity. They were to arrest Naboth and put him in the criminal's dock and brand him with a terrible charge.

What was this charge to be? "Thou didst blaspheme God and the king," an abhorrent thing to every Jew and especially to this honest, pious peasant. How was the evidence for such a charge to be found? Easily enough—make it. Get two worthless fellows that will testify to anything for a little money and put them up against Naboth. Then carry him out and stone him to death. Thus wrote this Lucrezia Borgia to these Jewish elders.

No deadlier poison was ever compounded, no sharper dagger was ever whetted against an unsuspecting and innocent victim. The letter hisses with the tongues of a thousand serpents. Hypocrisy, lying, perjury, ferocity, murder are all coiled up in it and ready to strike with their fatal fangs.

The program was carried out to the letter. The elders, subservient tools of wicked rulers, proceeded to proclaim a fast, and thereby suborned religion to play the part of a perjurer. Naboth was seized, charged with blasphemy, condemned and stoned. The conspiracy was put through in short order, and word was sent back to Jezebel that "Naboth was stoned, and is dead." An honest innocent man, working his own vineyard and worshiping his God, was hurried off from his home and family and presently lay a mangled mass of flesh to gratify a covetous king's greed and a wicked woman's spite.

Strange things happen in this world. Some terrible jolt has thrown it out of joint. Nothing is too hideous and horrible for depraved human hearts to conceive and human hands to execute. The blood of the innocent often cries from the ground and justice seems to have fled or fallen asleep. But let us possess our souls in patience: the end is not yet.

4. An Iniquitous Triumph

Jezebel, having received the news, was now ready to fulfil her promise to Ahab. "Arise," she said, "take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead." What an air of triumph breathes through her words, of contempt

for Naboth and of scarcely concealed contempt for the pusillanimous king who had failed and feared to do what she had so easily done? "Which he refused to give thee for money," a refusal which she thought the king ought not to have tolerated and which she quickly smothered in blood. "Which he refused to give thee for money," a refusal which this woman could not understand, for she thought every man had his price.

But there are some things a man ought never to sell and that money cannot buy. Your honesty and honor, your faith and your faithfulness, sell them not.

Jezebel could not understand Naboth, but she could put him out of the way. "Take possession of the vineyard," she said, "for Naboth is not alive, but dead." Naboth, she thought, was all that stood in the way of taking the vineyard. No principle of justice and right stood in the way, no conscience, no retribution, no God stood in the way. Naboth is dead—how conclusive seemed her logic and how sure her triumph!

How many things do we think we have put out of our way because we think they are no longer alive but dead? Often men put conscience out of their way by hushing its voice, it may be by an act of injustice or even in blood.

5. A Dreadful Doom

"And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it." Ahab was either too conscientious or too cowardly to do such a deed himself, but he was not conscientious or brave enough to refuse the fruits of such a crime after it was committed.

Many a man that would not steal himself will yet take stolen goods. Many people are trying to keep themselves free from the guilt of sin while they are yet enjoying the fruits of sin. Let not the man that embezzles money blame the fault on his fashionable wife: he stole that money himself.

How exultingly Ahab went down into that vineyard! Already he could see those vines rooted up and all that rocky slope set with rare plants in full

bloom. No more would that vineyard be a blot on the landscape as he looked out of his palace window, but it would be a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

But what did Ahab see, whom did he meet in that vineyard? He met Elijah! Elijah the prophet of fire and judgment stood there, saying, "Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." The dogs also should eat Jezebel by the rampart of Jezreel. In that stolen vineyard Ahab heard his own dreadful doom and saw with his mind's eye his own splattered blood.

After all there is justice in the world, and sooner or later it comes to its day. Evil shall slay the wicked, and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. The cloud of injustice and oppression and violence may grow dark and threatening and the great Avenger may seem careless, yet "behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own."

It is easy and it gives us peculiar satisfaction to join in judgment on such grave crimes in this distant age or on such terrible deeds in our own day. But the pure and dispassionate Emerson said that he had never heard of a crime that he himself might not have committed, and the germs of all evil are lurking in our hearts. Had it not been for the grace of God we ourselves might be guilty of such misdeeds.

We are especially subject to the social sin of not respecting the rights of others. We may infringe upon their rights in various ways, their rights of reputation and of personality and even their property rights. The golden rule should strictly apply to all our social relations and we should be careful and earnest in doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. Only on this basis can we live together in common welfare, and any other basis will involve us in ruin.

LESSON VI.—FEBRUARY 5

ELIJAH TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN

Divine Approval of Faithful Service

Golden Text: Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Rev. 2:10.

Devotional Reading: I Thess. 4:13–18.

Reference Material: Mark, 9:2–8; II Tim. 4:1–8.

Lesson Text: II Kings, 2:5–11

5 And the sons of the prophets that *were* at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know *it;* hold ye your peace.
6 And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, *As* the LORD liveth, and *as* thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.
7 And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.
8 And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped *it* together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.
9 ¶ And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.
10 And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: *nevertheless,* if thou see me *when I am* taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be *so.*
11 And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Two Prophets on Their Last Journey.
2. A Hard Request.
3. The Final Scene.

Came forth what seemed a fiery car
On rushing wheels, each wheel a star.

We have come to the closing scene in Elijah's life and it is a fitting conclusion and climax to the fiery prophet's career.

He had already called Elisha, the plowman of Abel-meholah, to be his successor. Never were two men more strongly contrasted. The one, a rest-

less nomad and flying specter from the desert: the other, a settled farmer and a citizen of a town; the one, breathing forth judgment and slaughter: the other, abounding in healing ministries; the one, terrible as a stroke of lightning: the other, gentle as a morning sunbeam; the one, the earthquake and fire of Horeb: the other, the still small voice.

God uses men having gifts differing, and we must not think that the kingdom will not prosper because the new pastor or superintendent, the new mayor or president who are coming in are of a different type and temper.

1. The Two Prophets on Their Last Journey

These two men, master and disciple, set out on this last journey together. There were schools of the prophets or theological seminaries at Gilgal, and Bethel and Jericho, and Elijah made them a farewell visit. Elisha went along and the coming prophet was thus introduced to the students. The Lord had revealed to Elijah that his time was come and it was understood that this was his last appearance. At Bethel and at Jericho the sons of the prophets annoyed Elisha with their question, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to day?" Probably these young theologians did not think much of Elisha and virtually twitted the rustic plowman with his unfitness for the office of prophet after his master would be gone. What college or theological seminary had he attended? But Elisha told them that he knew some things himself and rebuked their voluble conceit and impertinent prying into his business by bidding them hold their tongues. The plowman-prophet was able to take care of himself and the rash students subsided into silence.

Men will be judged, not by the college they have attended, but by the work they do.

Elijah endeavored to restrain Elisha from attending him on this final journey. He vainly bade him tarry at Gilgal and Bethel, and at Jericho for a third time he urged him, "Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan." His motive may have been the desire to be alone in these last mysterious hours, or to spare Elisha the pain of parting, or to test his young disciple and strengthen his devotion and faith.

Elisha would not listen to any such proposal, which he regarded as unfaithfulness to his master in his supreme trial, and uttered the solemn oath, "As

the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." The young plowman has in him a strong element of loyalty and nothing can turn him back from his devoted purpose. Such loyalty to his chief is one mark of a prophet and seals Elisha as a coming man.

The same inflexible devotion should bind us to the Lord Jesus and cause us to follow him through evil and good report and falter not even at his cross. No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.

2. A Hard Request

So the two went on. No allusion was made to the mysterious event that was before them except as it was delicately veiled under the reference to Elijah's mission to the Jordan, as though this were an ordinary journey from which he would soon return.

We do not like death to thrust its ugly presence too plainly into our speech. We rarely speak bluntly to the sick and dying of death, but cover up the grim fact under pleasant phrases and hopeful anticipations.

Arrived at the Jordan, Elijah smote the waters with his prophet's mantle, the sign and seal of his divine authority, and the parted waters let the master and his disciple pass over on dry ground. Fifty theological students stood on a cliff and saw the two prophets recede in the distance out of sight. The last moment was near and the master asked the disciple what he would have him do for him.

What one asks in such circumstances is a high test of character. The thought that comes into almost every mind in such connection is some worldly gift: " Help me to a place of honor or profit; put me in your will for a large sum of money."

No such thought threw its shadow across this young plowman's mind. "And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." A double portion was the heritage of the firstborn who succeeded to the headship of the family and estate. Elisha asked for the spirit of his master, his wisdom and authority and power, that he might be fitted to be his successor. He asked for no external position, but for internal power; not for wealth, but for wisdom; not for a worldly crown, but for heavenly character.

His desire and prayer was that he should be strengthened with might by the spirit in the inner man; such a man will be endued with power from on high and will turn faith into fact.

How much better off would many a son be if instead of receiving his father's wealth he received his father's wisdom? Seldom does a great man transmit his genius or his spirit to his son, but such an inheritance would far surpass any position or name he could leave him. Webster could leave his son an honorable name and secure for him a considerable place in the world, but he could not impart to him his imperial personality and power.

Elijah answered, "Thou hast asked a hard thing." It is comparatively easy to give money or any external gift, but it is hard to impart spirit, wisdom, faith and character. Such teaching calls for a strong, rich soul to give and an attentive, obedient soul to receive.

We should ask hard things and strive after high achievements, aiming at heavenly visions and endeavoring to take the kingdom of heaven by violence.

"Thou hast asked a hard thing," said Elijah: "nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken up from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so."

It is a hard thing to impart and receive spirit, wisdom, character, nevertheless it can be done. But it is a process in which master and disciple must coöperate: the master cannot bestow his spirit upon his disciple as an arbitrary gift, but the two must work together, and the master's giving must be met with the disciple's sympathetic and coöperative receiving. The mother can pour her spirit into the child, the teacher into the scholar, the master into the disciple, and God into man, if there is this mutual coworking. If we gird ourselves up to this high aim and put forth our receptive power, we shall receive this gift.

"If thou see me": what is this but sympathetically and receptively seeing the master, the exercise of attention and insight and obedience that enables us to penetrate to and possess his secret, that endues us with his spirit? Disciples that come under the power and are saturated with the spirit of great masters gaze at

them until they absorb their thoughts and assimilate their speech and grow into their likeness. Great men often thus lift ordinary men up towards their own level and enable them to do the same works that they do. Shakespeare inspired half a dozen minor poets until they wrote poetry that with difficulty can be distinguished from his own.

To possess wisdom we must first have the insight to see it; to acquire spiritual power we must first have spiritual affinities; to become Christians in spirit and power we must ever look unto Christ.

3. The Final Scene

Still the master and the disciple went on and still they talked with only an occasional allusion to the impending parting. How beautifully their friendship ran on unbroken up to the last moment, touched only here and there with painful anticipation.

Such friendship cannot be snapped asunder at death, but bears in its bosom the promise and potency of immortality.

Suddenly a strange thing happened. We cannot tell just what it was and only know the impression it made on Elisha. "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." It was fitting that the fiery prophet should ride off in a chariot of fire; that the messenger that seemed to fly on the wings of the wind should be caught up in a whirlwind. There was a flash, a blaze of light, the rush of a fiery chariot, a mighty whirlwind, and the prophet was gone.

It was a spectacular departure granted only once for a special purpose, but it was no more glorious in the sight of heaven than the departure of the humblest saint or the death of the penitent thief on the cross. God has myriads of golden chariots that roll unseen along all the highways of the sky and carry departing saints from earth up through the gates into the city.

"And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! And he saw him no more." The meaning of this exclamation appears to be that it expresses Elisha's thought of his

master. As Elijah was Elisha's spiritual father, so was he the true chariot and horsemen of Israel, its real strength and defense.

The strength of any nation is not found in its guns and warships, but in the men that are its leaders and conscience and spiritual might. A nation may be armed to the teeth, and yet go down in war as Goliath went tumbling down before David. The loss of one man may weaken a nation more than the loss of all its chariots of war. The nation is strong, the church is mighty, only as it has prophets that are clothed with the spirit of righteousness and truth. Elisha's pathetic cry expressed his feeling that Elijah's departure bereft him of a father and Israel of its strength.

Often does a nation, or a church, or a family feel that its very life is gone when a masterful leader is taken away, yet life does not stop. God has not made the world's destiny to depend on any one man, however great and strong he may be. In fact the greatest prophet may disappear, very much as a raindrop disappears in the ocean. Sometimes it seems needful that great men should go in order that other men may come forward. Even Jesus found it was expedient that he should go away in order that the Holy Spirit might come in the plenitude of his presence and power. Thus passed this great prophet out of sight in his chariot of fire: and though it seemed that he had left a gap that could never be filled, yet history moved on and another prophet stepped forward into his place.

LESSON VII.—FEBRUARY 12

ELISHA AND THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN

Our Ministry of Comfort and Help

Golden Text: Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. John, 5:25.

Devotional Reading: I Cor. 15:50–58.

Reference Material: John, 11:1–46.

Lesson Text: II Kings, 4:18–22, 27, 30, 32–35

18 ¶ And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his father to the reapers.
19 And he said unto his father, My head, my head! And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother.
20 And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and *then* died.
21 And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut *the door* upon him, and went out.
22 And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.

27 And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul *is* vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid *it* from me, and hath not told me.

30 And the mother of the child said, *As* the LORD liveth, and *as* thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her.

32 And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, *and* laid upon his bed.
33 He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD.
34 And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.
35 Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. A Mother's Faith.
2. A Pathetic Appeal.
3. An Impotent Staff.
4. A Prophet's Power.
5. A Mother's Care.

We have here one of Elisha's miracles of healing. In the village of Shunem, near Jezreel, was a hospitable home, where the prophet was accustomed to tarry for rest and refreshment on his travels. The wife in this home is called "a great woman," and the narrative makes good the name. She had built a chamber with an outside entrance and furnished it for Elisha, so that the weary man was always welcome and could turn in at his pleasure.

This cozy, cheery room has had a long and honorable line of descendants, for it has given its name to many a " prophet's chamber " to this day.

In this great woman's home there was something lacking, for the fullest human life is at some point incomplete and unsatisfied. She was contented in her home, but there was in it no baby blossom to call out the warmth and wealth of her affections and satisfy the maternal yearnings of her heart. The prophet saw the lack, and in answer to his prayer a baby boy was laid in her bosom and her cup of joy was brimming full.

But the darling child was suddenly snatched from her and in the darkness of her loss this woman's real greatness shines out in purest splendor.

The boy out in the harvest field under a blazing Syrian sky was sunstruck and cried, "My head, my head!" The father said, and it is the very thing any father would say, "Carry him to his mother."

The scene is now full of intense excitement, but through it all the mother is calm and knows just what to do.

She did not lose her head and go wild with grief, but maintained her self-control and did just the right thing at the right time.

She held the child on her knees until noon, when he died. Then she carried the precious body up and laid it on the bed of the man of God. In quick decisive tones she ordered a servant to come and an ass to be saddled. "Drive, and slack not thy riding for me."

1. A Mother's Faith

Over on Mount Carmel Elisha was resting after one of his preaching tours. The fiery sun was westering and the cool shadows were lengthening eastward.

Elisha looking out over the plain of Esdraelon discerned in the distance an approaching figure on an ass and presently made it out to be his hospitable hostess of Shunem. Suspecting that something was wrong, he sent his servant to run to meet her and to inquire, "Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?" And she answered, "It is well."

The woman's faith is now showing its mastery of the situation. It was faith that drove her in flying haste to "the man of God." Jehovah was her Great Physician, and she believed that the prophet was his servant and could dispense his healing power. It was faith that controlled her emotions and enabled her to answer that piercing question of the servant, "Is it well with the child?" What profound trust and calmness and hope were in her heart that, with her only child and darling boy dead in her home, she could yet say, "It is well." O woman, great is thy faith.

Her faith was not a passive, fatalistic trust, but active energy that was intensely earnest and urgent in the use of means. She trusted God and then went for the doctor.

2. A Pathetic Appeal

The Shunammite scarcely slackened her speed to answer the servant and hastened on to the prophet himself. She prostrated herself before him and caught him by the feet—an Oriental mode of beseeching a favor. Gehazi the servant stepped forward to thrust her away, thinking that she was intruding upon the master. This unfeeling fellow had small power of understanding and sympathizing with the broken-hearted mother, and was going to put her out as a disturber of the prophet's comfort and peace.

But Elisha said, "Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me." The prophet was a man of sympathetic insight and kindness and courtesy and dealt tenderly and graciously with the pleading woman. His heart read the story of her sorrow though she told it not. We are reminded of the rudeness of the disciples in rebuking the mothers that brought their children unto Jesus and of the Saviour's fine answer, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not."

An obtuse, repellent attitude towards those seeking help is a cruel thing and we should cultivate the insight of sympathy and always deal kindly with those in distress.

The mother said to Elisha, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" She had not asked for a child and the prophet had given it to her of his own good will: would he now take it from her? was he thus deceiving her hopes and breaking her heart?

This argment lies at the basis of all prayer. "He hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture," is the firm ground on which we stand when we plead with God. He has given us life and therefore we appeal unto him to give us grace to make life complete. The same principle runs on out into the world beyond and pledges us life immortal.

3. An Impotent Staff

Elisha now saw it was a case for quick action. He commanded Gehazi to seize the prophet's staff, speed away and stay not his steps even to receive or give a salute, and lay the staff on the face of the child. The mother was distrustful of the servant's power and declared with a solemn oath that she would not leave Elisha and thus compelled him to return with her. It was not the prophet's staff that she wanted, but the prophet himself. She would trust no second-hand means of blessing, but only the personal touch of the man of God.

Her judgment was soon justified, for Gehazi, after vainly passing the staff over the face of the dead boy, returned, saying, "The child is not awaked."

What was the secret of this failure? The virtue was not in the staff, but only in the prophet behind the staff. The staff in itself was only a stick: when grasped by the hand of Elisha it grew alive and electric with divine life and power; through it streamed energies that could quicken the dead: but when held by the hand of Gehazi, it was only a piece of dead wood and received and gave no healing virtue. Give the prophet any rough stick and with it he will raise the dead.

It is not a better staff of richer wood and finer finish we need, but more power to use the staff we have.

Gehazi presently proved himself to be a hypocrite and a thief: he was a bad man and therefore could not handle a prophet's staff. There was no divine life in him, and therefore no life could come out of him. Bad men cannot handle holy things.

If we would heal others by our touch, we must first be healed ourselves and have in us the grace of the Lord Jesus.

4. A Prophet's Power

Elisha stepped up into his familiar chamber and shut the door. The prophet found himself alone with the dead body and the living God. There lay the boy beautiful in death on the prophet's bed. In the secrecy and silence of that room Elisha prayed unto the Lord. No word of the prayer is recorded, but we know that he begged for that boy's life. No mention is made of the staff: after all, the staff is not needed when the prophet is present; the true prophet can do without his staff, for he has life in himself.

Elisha prayed for the boy; as yet no sign of life appeared. Then the prophet began the use of means: he lay upon the child and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands. He came into vital touch with the child at every point so as to quicken him with his own life. The child began to grow warm: sign of returning vitality. Then the prophet walked the floor as if in an agony of suspense, a paroxysm of prayer. He would not let God go until he got a blessing. Again he resorted to the use of means and stretched himself upon the child. At last human prayer and divine power prevailed, and the child sneezed as respiration returned and then opened his eyes: the boy was alive.

This miracle is a physical counterpart of the quickening of dead souls into spiritual life. Prayer to God and personal contact with men are the means by which we are to restore them to newness of life.

5. A Mother's Care

Elisha now sent his servant to call the mother, and when she came, he said to her, "Take up thy son." The prophet knew when his work was done; he did not forget that where his work ended the mother's work began. The prophet could do some things that the mother could not do, and the mother could do some things that the prophet could not do: each kept within his and her own proper sphere, and neither attempted to do the work of the other.

We must not do for others what they can and should do for themselves. We should help them up to the point where they can help themselves and there our help should stop. We have gifts differing, and each one is given his own work to do. Many a prophet can

preach a great sermon and raise the spiritually dead who could not nurse a baby or perhaps even rightly train his own boy.

The wise prophet will make use of many mothers in his work. When it comes to training children, the mothers must take them up. However much divine grace does for a child, there comes a point where God says to the mother, "Take up thy son."

"And she took up her son, and went out." How much we owe to our mothers who "took us up" and bore us in their arms through infancy and childhood? "All that I am," said Abraham Lincoln, "I owe to my angel mother." Many if not most great men are explained by their mothers, and back of every good son look for a good mother. And still the supreme work of mothers is the rearing of children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

The next generation will largely be what the mothers of this day make of their children; and every woman called to this high office should accept it as her noblest crown of honor and her greatest responsibility. Teachers stand in the same line of training the plastic souls of the young. A teacher may impart a single idea or impulse that will shape the character and conduct of a scholar for life. Even the unconscious influence of example goes far deeper and wider than the teacher can know and reaches through the years.

As the prophet said to this mother, "Take up thy son," so does God say to every mother, "Take up thy son," and to the teacher, "Take up thy scholar." Such responsibility may well make us tremble, but it should also come to us as a great privilege and joy.

LESSON VIII.—FEBRUARY 19

ELISHA AND NAAMAN THE SYRIAN

How to Overcome National and Racial Prejudices

Golden Text: Bless the Lord, O my soul: and forget not all his benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy disease.
Psalm, 103:2–3.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 103:1–12.

Reference Material: Luke, 4:16–30; 5:12–16.

Lesson Text: II Kings, 5:1–4, 9–14

Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valor, *but he was* a leper.

2 And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife.

3 And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord *were* with the prophet that *is* in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.

4 And *one* went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that *is* of the land of Israel.

9 So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.

10 And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

11 But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

12 *Are* not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

13 And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, *if* the prophet had bid thee *do some* great thing, wouldest thou not have done *it?* how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

14 Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. A Fair Biography with a Terrible Blot.

2. A Child's Faith and Brave Speech.

3. A Futile Spectacular Performance.

4. A Prophet's Scorned Message.

5. A Leper Angry Yet Healed.

We are first shown Naaman the patient. See how he is described: "Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valor." These are his list of titles, rivaling in length the string of mystical letters that sometimes goes trailing after a man's name across the printed page like a comet's tail.

He was captain of the host, commander-in-chief of all the armies of Syria, and a great man with the king; he was honorable, no spot was on his reputation and the very seal of the Lord was upon him, for by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria; and he was a mighty man of valor, a brave man whose courage no one dared challenge.

1. A Fair Biography with a Terrible Blot

All these honorable titles are put down and admitted. The Bible never depreciates a man below his true worth. It does not say that any man is as bad as he can be; it admits and praises a great deal of natural good in men.

Naaman, being such a great and honorable man, what more does he need? Why should such a man need to be saved? What is the matter with him? A terrible thing is the matter with him against which all these honors count for nothing. Read what comes after all these titles and see how black and dreadful the very letters look: "but he was a leper!"

The Bible admits his honors, but puts its finger on his leprosy. It does not deny his great titles, but it lifts his silken robes and lets us see his spotted flesh. Naaman has a fair biography, but it has upon it a terrible blot.

And so is it with the natural man. He may be honest as a business man, faithful as a husband and father, generous in his sympathies, and the Bible admits all this. What more does this man need?

Does he still need to be saved? Yes. Why? Is he not an honorable man? Yes, but he is a sinner! After all his virtues the Bible writes down the terrible word sinner. And it is a terrible word, more dreadful morally than the word leper is physically; a spiritual malady that puts a cancerous core in the heart and poisons all the life-blood and spots the character and at last will destroy the soul.

2. A Child's Faith and Brave Speech

Let us follow the steps by which this leper was healed. "And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away out of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife." This seems a long way around to the healing of Naaman. What has this to do with it? It has everything to do with it.

All things work together. When God is about to heal or bless some one, he may start the chain of events in a far-off land, as a great tidal wave rolling in on a shore may have its cause in a submarine upheaval five thousand miles away. These marauding Syrians did not know what they were doing when they caught that little Jewish girl and brought her to Syria. It reads as though this were all they got and perhaps they were much laughed at when they returned with such a pitiful booty. But that capture turned out to be the greatest prize they could have taken. It was like bringing home a little seed that had in it a whole harvest of blessing.

No one knows what he may be doing in bringing up or teaching a child. Out of that child may come influences that will heal leprosy and bless the world.

"And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." This little maid had lost her parents, home, freedom, native land: what had she kept? She had kept her faith in God and his prophet; infinitely the best part of her life she still had.

Small difference what else we may lose if we only keep this.

She was a captive and a slave in a foreign heathen land: what did she do with her faith? The temptation was strong with her to hide her religion and let it lapse. What chance did she have to worship God and do any good? But in these hard circumstances she lived her religion and preached it. The surrounding idolatry did not stifle her simple faith. Timidity did not seal her lips. But when she knew her master had leprosy she spoke right out and said, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!"

That brave speech and timely word saved the great man's life. This was the first note of the gospel music for him; the first link in

the golden chain that led to his salvation. Children can render many beautiful and blessed ministries in our human world. They can bring people to Jesus. They can eloquently tell of the Prophet that can heal the leprosy of sin. The pleading earnestness and love of a child-voice goes deep into the heart and leads many to the cleansing fountain.

3. A Futile Spectacular Performance

The words of the Jewish maid were reported to Naaman and to the king of Syria, and the king ordered Naaman to go to the king of Israel. "And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment."

The simple wish of the maid is here being turned into a very elaborate and costly performance. Kings have got hold of the business and its simplicity is becoming a pompous affair of state. The maid said nothing about the king of Israel and nothing about silver and gold, but worldly minds think nothing can be done without money and royal power and spectacular pageantry, and while intent on these things they are missing the whole point of the maid's prayer.

This is a danger that always attends religion. The gospel has had added to it human additions of priestly and papal power; and it has had piled on it complicated creeds and gorgeous rituals and costly churches and carved altars and purple vestments and jeweled crosses until the simple teaching of Jesus, uttered on the seashore or hillside under no roof but heaven's blue, has been turned into an elaborate system and splendid pageant in which the leper's leprosy is often well-nigh forgotten.

We need to keep close to the simple gospel. All this display of pomp and costly gifts ended in a ridiculous fiasco. It simply scared the king of Israel out of his wits. What could he do for the leper? And what can any man do for a moral leper? Who can forgive sin but God only? No use going to pope or priest or preacher for healing: they may tell us who can heal us, but cannot do the work themselves. Money cannot buy a pure heart. Morality cannot cleanse the leprosy of sin and create holiness. There is only one Prophet to whom we must go for the healing of our sin.

4. A Prophet's Scorned Message

While all this spectacular performance was going on, what had become of the little maid's prayer?

> It was utterly forgotten of men, but not of God: it had winged its way to his throne, as every true prayer does, and was there working out its purpose.

Elisha heard of what had happened and said to the king of Israel, "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

> In a case of great necessity everything may depend on going to the right man. There may be only one man in all the world that can meet our need. In the great need of salvation Jesus only has words of eternal life.

"So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood before the door of Elisha." The gorgeous pageant moved away from the king's palace to the prophet's humble door. There is hope for Naaman now: he is nearing the place of healing; the little maid's prayer is getting answered. Elisha sent a servant out and told him to go and wash seven times in the Jordan. "But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper."

So leprosy was not the only malady that Naaman had; he had the disease of pride. He supposed the humble prophet would be greatly flattered at having such a distinguished man come to him in such splendid state and would be very obsequious to him. And as for the Jordan, were not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? He wanted no foreign means of salvation: home goods were good enough for him.

> This proud general wanted to be saved, but he wanted to be saved in his own way so as not to hurt his own sense of dignity, and many a sinner wants to be saved in the same way.

5. A Leper Angry Yet Healed

So Naaman turned away in a rage.

That was not the worst thing he might have done after all. Cold-blooded indifference to the prophet's message would have been worse. The most

hopeless cases among those who hear the gospel are they that are so seared and hardened that they cannot be moved, not even made mad.

There is hope for one who gets angry at the gospel—look at the case of Paul—for he still has feeling and his anger may become a glorious passion for Christ.

It was so with Naaman. His leprosy was his terrible doom and he came there to get rid of it. If he had been told to do some great thing, would he not have done it? Why not try this simple thing? And he seems to have thought, "Sure enough, why not?" "Then he went down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

Is not this the very simplicity of the gospel? After all the costly presents and pageantry for the king and the display before the prophet, after all his own thoughts of offended pride and anger, this great man humbled himself and simply did as he was told. He accepted salvation on its own terms and was clean.

After all our efforts at making ourselves pure, after all our pride and thoughts and difficulties, we need only believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and we shall be saved.

Men have devised many religions and philosophies and substitutes for the gospel which they have imagined would save their souls and regenerate society. Pagan faiths have endeavored to achieve this end in multitudinous forms, some of them hideous, others of them more rational, all of them more or less sincere and often pathetic, but all of them proving their futility in their sad failure and degenerate fruits.

Christian lands have swarmed with cults that have rejected or maimed Christian truth and have a human way of salvation; but their fruits do not prove their efficiency or commend them.

Many a man has a little private river of his own which his pride assures him is sufficient to wash away his sin; but after dipping himself in it many times the fatal leprosy remains. God has opened on Calvary the only fountain which has this cleansing power, and if we will only plunge into its healing flood we shall be clean.

LESSON IX.—FEBRUARY 26

ELISHA'S HEAVENLY DEFENDERS

What Faith in the Unseen Can Do for Us

Golden Text: The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. Psalm, 34:7.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 34:1–8.

Reference Material: Daniel, 6:1–23; Heb. 1:14, 11:27.

Lesson Text: II Kings, 6:8–17

8 ¶ Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place *shall be* my camp.
9 And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down.
10 And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice.
11 Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us *is* for the king of Israel?
12 And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that *is* in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.
13 ¶ And he said, Go and spy where he *is*, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, *he is* in Dothan.
14 Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.
15 And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, a host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?
16 And he answered, Fear not: for they that *be* with us *are* more than they that *be* with them.
17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. The Ministry of Warning.

2. A Warning That Worked.

3. An Entrapped Prophet.

4. The Horses and Chariots of God.

5. A Delivered Prophet and a Forgiven Enemy.

Embattled legions girt the prophet round
With blazoned banners and heaven-tempered spears,
Horses and chariots, in whose fiery sheen,
The pomp of Syria's army but appears
Like a dim candle in the noonday blaze:
The mount is full of angels.

We are here given a glimpse into Israel's foreign relations in which it is emerging from isolation into international politics. There were beginning to roll in upon the little Jewish kingdom the first waves of the vast Syrian and Assyrian sea that finally overwhelmed it in disaster.

1. The Ministry of Warning

The king of Syria as he was about to invade Israel held a council of war with his generals and determined to pitch his camp at a certain point. Elisha warned the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down."

There is a ministry of warning. We are ever driving the ship of life over a sea largely unknown to us, and we need a man that can interpret the chart and compass and watch the stars.

The prophet in every field is our guide. In business, education, science, statesmanship he forecasts the future and tells us where to go and what to avoid. Elisha tilled no fields and built no houses, but he disseminated wisdom that tended to make fields more fruitful and homes more secure. The prophet is a greater man than the king: he gives stability to the kingdom and without him the king would lose his crown. The prophets of the world have ever been its guides and leaders, they have shown it visions that have been its inspiration and salvation.

The Bible is a book of warnings and sets up many a sign-board that reads, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." Beware that thou pass not such a place. There is a Prophet whose voice unerringly warns us against danger, and who himself ever goes before us in the right path: he that followeth him shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

2. A Warning That Worked

The King of Israel followed the directions of Elisha and was delivered several times. The prophet's predictions came to pass and his warning worked.

That quiet, gentle man sitting in his humble home thwarted hostile armies and delivered the king.

It pays to follow the advice of a prophet. Though his warning may spoil our plans and cut into our cherished ambition, yet it will save us from defeat and work out our welfare. His clarified heavenly vision can see farther than our clogged earthly sight, and the ambushed Syrians are always where he says they are. If we obey him we shall escape them.

The Bible never warns us of fictitious enemies or hangs out false signals. When we follow its warnings we shall be saved, not once or twice only, but every time. These old-fashioned commandments are still the sure way of deliverance.

The heart of the king of Syria was troubled at this strange miscarriage of his plans. His wisest counsels and most cunning schemes came to naught, and he found himself baffled and checked at every point, and yet he could not discover the cause. There was always in the situation an unknown factor which he could not calculate and control, an unseen enemy mocked him, a spirit hand turned all things against him. He was environed in mystery and uncertainty terrified him.

There is always in human affairs an element that the human mind cannot foresee, a higher power that thwarts our plans where they are in conflict with its own.

3. An Entrapped Prophet

The perplexed Syrian king began to suspect treachery in his own camp and inquired, "Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?" A very pertinent question, for the cause of our weakness may be within, among ourselves, as well as without, among our enemies.

When a man is being baffled and defeated in life, he may well inquire whether the trouble is not in himself rather than in his circumstances.

A negative answer, however, was given in this case, and the hidden cause was located elsewhere. "None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber." Through hearing reports of his words or shrewd foresight

or supernatural revelation, the prophet was able to hit upon the Syrian king's plans, and thus thwarted him.

The king talked too much. After all the king was the spy in his own camp and was defeating himself, for his loose words stole out of his bedchamber into far-off ears and compassed his ruin. Many a man lets words slip out of him, even out of his most private talk, that reach unintended ears and turn up against him in unexpected ways.

The king had a ready remedy for this trouble: "Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him." Catch that prophet and bring him to me! The king believed that if he could only catch and kill the prophet, he could arrest the prophet's ideas and stop his influence: a theory of dealing with prophets that has not yet wholly died out of the world.

That night a swarm of soldiers and horses and chariots settled down around Dothan and the prophet was caught! The king had his man! What chance had this farmer-prophet with no other weapon than a sheepskin mantle to defend himself or to escape? The Syrian king thus put his trust in horses and chariots against a prophet's power. He believed that material forces are mightier than spiritual influences.

Is not this old heathen heresy still lurking in our minds and hearts? The magnificence and might of the material civilization in which we live overwhelm us with a sense of its power. We come insensibly to believe that the forces that created all this splendid fabric can do anything; we begin to have more faith in steam than in spirit, in guns than in goodness, in a strong arm than in a pure heart. And thus we come to have the heathen trust "in reeking tube and iron shard," and forget that it is "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

4. The Horses and Chariots of God

The next morning, when the prophet and his servant rose early and walked forth, they saw the town beleaguered with horses and chariots. The young man was badly scared and exclaimed, "Alas, my master, how shall we do?" The young Jew took the same view of the horses and chariots as did the Syrian king: he thought they settled the question of the prophet's capture, and so his fright was just as great as the king's faith.

But the prophet saw deeper and took a different view. "Fear not," he said: "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." What brave words are these, what spiritual insight do they disclose, how like they sound to a bold utterance of Paul or a calm saying of Jesus?

When we count up the forces that are against us in the way of righteousness, we find they are only man plus the devil; but when we count up the forces that are for us, we find they are man plus God. And if God is for us, who can be against us? Nobody that we need count or fear.

Then the prophet prayed for the young man that his eyes might be opened. "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

The veil was parted and he was given a glimpse into the spiritual world. Invisible forces started forth into form and became a blazing host. The unseen armies of God pitched their tents on that mountainside and rolled their fiery chariots into view. The vision only revealed the latent forces that always exist. The lightning that leaps out of the cloud in a vivid bolt of fire all the while lay invisibly leashed in the sky. If we had senses sufficiently refined and exquisite we could see it before it flashes upon us.

God's world is full of flaming forces, angels, ministering spirits, that we in our earthliness and blindness cannot see; but they are there all the while. At times we become strangely conscious of them, and they almost tremble upon our sight. This unseen world is the real world of which this material world is only the shadow. There reside the master forces, there God marshals his armies for the defense of his children. To catch sight of that world our vision should be strained, behind that veil our anchor should be cast. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things."

5. A Delivered Prophet and a Forgiven Enemy

Deliverance was now wrought. In answer to Elisha's prayer, the Syrians were smitten with blindness, or rather, as the word means, with dazzled bewilderment and hallucination. It was as though the same splendor that on the one side appeared as shining horses and chariots, on the other appeared as a burst of fire that smote men blind, or dazzled them so that they knew not where they were.

God wields a two-edged sword and its flash is either life or death according as we are on the right or the wrong side of it.

Elisha now had his enemies in his power and might have destroyed them in their helplessness, but he was of a different temper. He led the bewildered captives to the king of Israel, who would have murdered them in cold blood, but Elisha showed them mercy and ordered that they be fed and sent back to their king. Those that came forth to capture the prophet had their lives spared by the prophet and went home blessed by his hand.

This is a fine illustration of the just and humane spirit that should govern us in our relations with men of other races and nations. Racial and national prejudice and hatred, friction and strife, are among the most frequent and deepest causes of trouble in our world, leading us to treat with ignominy and injustice foreigners amongst us and at times breaking out in international discord and great wars. The spirit of the Good Samaritan, born of the common blood in all our veins and of the Spirit of God in our hearts, should restrain us from any such inhumanity and bind all people into brotherhood.

Such a spirit of justice and humanity in our nation is a better national defense against foreign injustice and war than all the warships we can build. The true league of nations must be founded in the hearts of the people of the world, and it will be realized when the angels' song of universal good will among men is translated from song into character and service.

The kingdom of God is the true fulfilment of all these hopes and dreams of a better world and a Golden Age, and however slowly it may be coming yet it is dawning as the morning light and will brighten towards the perfect day.

LESSON X.—MARCH 5

JEHOVAH'S MERCY TO A HEATHEN CITY

The Missionary Teaching of the Book of Jonah

Golden Text: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. Isaiah, 55:7.

Devotional Reading: Isaiah, 55:1–9.

Reference Material: Psalms, 117; 145; Isaiah, 45:20–25; 49:5–7; Jonah, 1:1–2:10; Mal. 1:10–11; John, 3:16.

Lesson Text: Jonah, 3:1–10

And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying,
2 Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.
3 So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.
4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.
5 ¶ So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.
6 For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered *him* with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.
7 And he caused *it* to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water:
8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that *is* in their hands.
9 Who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?
10 ¶ And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. A Penitent Heathen City.

2. A Merciful God.

3. A Disappointed Prophet.

4. The Mercy of the Lord.

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea.

The Book of Jonah is a foreign missionary tract inserted in the heart of the Old Testament.

It is a flashlight shot out over the ancient world revealing the universal fatherhood and love of God. It is a sharp rebuke to Jewish provincial bigotry, and to all such national narrowness, and a revelation of the wideness and freeness of the divine mercy. It contains only 48 verses and 1,328 words, so that it can be read through in a few minutes, yet how much it tells! Can any modern writer put as much into so few words? Count the first thirteen hundred words of any modern book and how far have we got, how little has been told?

The value of a book is not measured by the number of pages or volumes it fills or pounds it weighs. A diamond is worth more than a rock a million times its size and weight, and "Hamlet" is a greater literary treasure than many volumes of second-rate poetry. The Book of Jonah contains only a few hundred words, but every word gives a graphic touch to the story and adds to the beauty of its teaching.

This inspired writer has compacted the whole argument for foreign missions and at the same compressed the theology of God's character and relation to the world into this brief tract. As a literary achievement it ranks amongst works of genius, and as a religious revelation it has powerfully affected all Jewish and Christian thought and action.

Our lesson begins in the middle of the story after Jonah has endeavored in vain to escape the mission to which he was called and we find him walking the streets of Babylon, the London of the ancient world, uttering his one monotonous and melancholy cry, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

1. A Penitent Heathen City

The effect of this strange sermon was startling. "The people of Nineveh believed God."

That shows how natural and normal belief in God is to the universal human mind. The soul matches God as the dewdrop matches the sun, reflecting his image and answering to the influences of his Spirit.

This affinity of the soul with God is the universal soil on which the seeds of foreign missionary teaching can be sown and out of which the fruits of the gospel can grow. If there were no such

receptive soil out in the heathen world there would be no use in our sowing the gospel there.

This belief was followed with appropriate action. The people proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest even to the least. Faith led to repentance, which expressed itself in the outward form of fasting and coarse garments.

Repentance is not an exclusively Christian grace, but is a universal human experience as well known in heathen as in Christian countries. It is the soul turning in aversion from its own sin towards righteousness and God. It does not belong to any special class of people or stratum of society, but reaches through all classes, from the lowest to the highest. The king, together with his nobles, joined in this fasting, the very beasts had part in it, and an official proclamation called upon every one to turn from his evil way.

What an example does this ancient heathen city, sunk in vice, present to our modern cities that may be plunged deeper in guilt! What a blessing it would be if such a call to repentance were followed with such radical and genuine fruits of penitence in New York and Chicago and in all our cities!

2. A Merciful God

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said he would do unto them; and he did it not."

There is no real difficulty in this apparent change of mind on the part of God, for all his commands and warnings are accompanied with certain well-known conditions which are either expressed or implied.

God is not a fixed fate which cannot adapt its ways to the changed actions of men, but a Judge who administers justice tempered with mercy and a Father who has compassion on his children and is ever watchful for any penitence in their hearts which he can use as a basis of forgiveness. God is always the same God in his relation to men, but his very steadfastness of character requires him to adapt his action to the moral states and changes of men. In such adaptations and changes of his providence he seemed to men to repent, and such human language is freely used in the Scriptures.

The main point in this case was that God heard the cry of this great wicked heathen city and turned from his threatened destruction. He had the same mercy and forgiveness for heathen nations as for his own chosen people. Nineveh was as close to his ear and as dear to his heart as Jerusalem. Judea was no little bit of the globe on which the sun of divine favor exclusively shone, but the same broad bright beams of divine mercy fell around the whole earth. The Jews were already drawing their robes of self-righteousness around themselves as a superior people and were despising others, but God tore off their mask and showed them they were no better than others.

The universality of God's mercy and love is the basal fact of the world and the foundation of foreign missions to-day. All cities of the world lie open to the sunshine of the divine grace, in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Starting with this splendid breadth and universality of the love of God we go out to make disciples of all nations and are bold to enter the wickedest heathen city or go to the most degraded tribes.

3. A Disappointed Prophet

Let us follow the teaching of this great Book to its end. At this point the breadth and brightness of God's universal grace is narrowed and darkened by mistaken human prejudice and bigotry.

Jonah, the very preacher sent to Nineveh, was disappointed at the turn of affairs and cried out against God. He was angry with the grace extended to the heathen city, and this throws a flashlight upon his own state of mind and course of action. He had tried to escape delivering his message because, as he confesses, "I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth thee of the evil." Therefore he prays that his life may be taken away. So great and bitter is his disappointment that he would quench it in death.

This shows that the Jews knew the universal mercy of God. Never had they been taught by their prophets that his grace was confined to them as his favorites, but they were given many glimpses of his universal love. Yet they had in spite of this teaching cherished and intensified such a sense of their own superior privilege and worth that they had grown callous and blind to the outlying heathen world.

The same danger ever besets us. It is easy and flattering to our pride for us to think that we are the favorites of God and forget that all other men, whatever their color or race or rank, are also his children. We live in much clearer light than did the ancient Jews, and this is broadening our sympathies and stimulating our missionary work on a worldwide scale. Prejudice against foreign missions, while still lingering in remnants, has mostly disappeared, and this mission is now capturing the heart of the church as the inspiring program and privilege of Christianity and it is planting its posts around the world and winning victories of the greatest significance and promise.

4. The Mercy of the Lord

The Lord now taught his narrowminded and unfaithful prophet the truth by means of a parable or object-lesson.

Out on the east side of Nineveh Jonah sat waiting in moody depression to see what would befall the repentant city. Presently a gourd sprang up and sheltered him from the hot wind, and he was exceeding glad. A little personal comfort blotted out his sense of disappointment and filled his cup of satisfaction full.

It is wonderful how little it takes of worldly success and personal gratification to make some people forget their spiritual duties, especially the needs of the great sinful, suffering world. They can drown all such thoughts in a very small cup of worldly wine.

But the next morning the sun smote the gourd and withered it, and the unhindered rays beat hot upon the unhappy prophet. Then he quickly fell back into his old pessimistic mood and imagined he wanted to die.

As little as it takes to lift us up at times in satisfaction and pride, just so little does it take to cast us down again. A loss of some slight earthly comfort, a change in the wind and a twinge of rheumatism, any one of a hundred unimportant matters, may throw us into depression in which we may imagine that we want to die. This arises from a self-conscious and self-centered life. One cure for such a state of mind and infirmity of temper is to shift the emphasis of life from the center to the circumference, to look outward and

not inward; to be more conscious of others than of ourselves; and then our life will flow in normal and healthful currents.

This was the cure administered to Jonah. His consciousness was called off from himself to the great city, and his little personal comfort was contrasted with its immeasurable needs. "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

This abrupt ending of the book is one of its most masterful literary strokes, worthy of a great dramatist. God left this penetrating question working in the mind of his prophet and trusted him to answer it for himself.

And so does God trust us to answer this question, and our Christian hearts cannot let us go astray.

The Book of Jonah, while ancient in its form, is modern in its message. National narrowness and racial exclusiveness and pride are age-long sins of the human family, and we have by no means grown out of them; rather have they grown deeper and more intense with all our growth, and along with the economic cause they have ripped the world into fragments and convulsed it with war. The Great War was simply the greatest and most terrible outgrowth of this old root.

The doctrines of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man lay the ax at the root of this evil tree, and the Christian spirit should blight it so that it will wither and die. We are false to the very spirit of Christ and kingdom of God if we cherish any such view or feeling towards the people of other nations and races. God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and Christ hath tasted death for every man.

LESSON XI.—MARCH 12

AMOS WARNS ISRAEL

Social Evils Yet to Be Conquered

Golden Text: Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. Prov. 20:1.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 15:1–5.

Reference Material: Amos, 6:1–7; 7:10–15.

Lesson Text: Amos, 6:1–8

Woe to them *that are* at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, *which are* named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!
2 Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: *be they* better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?
3 Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near;
4 That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;
5 That chant to the sound of the viol, *and* invent to themselves instruments of music, like David;
6 That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.
7 ¶ Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.
8 The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***The Haughtiness of Rich Oppressors.***
2. ***Warning Examples.***
3. ***After Us the Deluge.***
4. ***Luxurious Ease and Gilded Vice.***
5. ***The Fateful Shadow of Coming Captivity.***

The prophet Amos was a shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees from Tekoa, in the kingdom of Judah, who traveled north into the kingdom of Israel and there exercised his ministry. Though not trained in a theological school, this farmer-prophet, like Elisha, was called of the Spirit to preach in

Israel. His sermons are pointedly practical and abound in homely phrases and figures of speech drawn from rustic life.

Israel under Jeroboam II had experienced a sudden expansion of territory and flashed up in its old-time splendor. But this was only the phosphorescence of decay and was attended with social evils and strife, the poor being oppressed by the rich, and luxury and vice growing up rank and noxious in this fertile soil.

Amos was a bold and fearless prophet and uttered piercing and powerful denunciations and warnings against the prevailing evils of his time.

1. The Haughtiness of Rich Oppressors

The prophet lets loose a bolt of lightning against the capitals of the two kingdoms. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!"

The people of these two cities prided themselves on their position and power. They sat upon their mountain heights and looked down in disdain upon all the world. They were the chief of these two kingdoms, the fine rich blossom of which the common people were only stalks and roots. To them, also, the house of Israel came, bringing treasures in the form of heavy taxes and taking away such justice as bribes would buy. In these circumstances the rulers in Jerusalem and Samaria gave themselves up to luxury and ease, and cared not for God or man.

Amos, the cowherd, was a bold prophet and struck high. Standing down among the common people, he looked up to the mountain tops and saw the pride with which they were crowned; and he bravely smote them with his burning shafts of condemnation and scorn.

High places are apt to breed a haughty spirit and a love of luxury and ease. Pride is one of the dangers of prosperity. Nowhere else is humility more protective, as well as more beautiful, than in places of power. The day that a man begins to relax his faithfulness and diligence and take his ease marks his decline.

The preacher must often look up and strike sin in high places. The fact that we live in Jerusalem or Samaria will not save us from condemnation and retribution in the day of our guilt. Around the loftiest heights of position and privilege and power divine judgment

beats and burns with the fiercest intensity. The first may be the last.

There are many at ease in the church, and they need to take heed lest, having been exalted to heaven, they may be cast down to hell.

2. Warning Examples

The prophet illustrates and emphasizes his warning with an object-lesson. He points the haughty dwellers in Jerusalem and Samaria to Calneh, far east on the Tigris, to Hamath, far to the north on the Orontes, and to Gath, in the southwest in Philistia. These were great and powerful cities; were "they better than these kingdoms? or is their border greater than your border?"

The argument is that God had exalted Jerusalem and Samaria among the cities of the world: therefore they should have acknowledged his goodness and remained faithful to him.

This is an argument that applies with intensified force to our nation. Look in what direction we will, we see people that have been enlarged and enriched by divine favor, and yet we find that we have been still more largely blessed. However wide their borders, ours are broader still. This is a reason why we should appreciate our privileges and use them wisely and faithfully in God's service.

But there was a further lesson in the prophet's illustration. These powerful cities had all fallen under a conqueror's hand. The pride and corruption springing out of their supremacy had proved their ruin. The people of Jerusalem and Samaria, looking out in every direction from their mountain heights, could see the woeful work of haughtiness and luxury and ease born of prosperity.

We need not look far to see the same results. Across the sea is a desolation of ruin wrought by domineering pride and power, and such retribution should warn and restrain us from the same evil course.

3. After Us the Deluge

The prophet points out one of the temptations that were leading the people of Israel to destruction: "Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the

seat of violence to come near." These corrupt rulers, living in a riot of revelry, were flattering themselves that the day of judgment was far off and would never overtake them.

This has ever been a soothing benumbing thought to all evil doers. "After us the deluge," was a current saying among the French aristocracy during the period preceding the Revolution.

This fallacy of the future lures men into all kinds of sin. Because judgment does not come with one swift stride, it is pushed back far into the future whence it is thought it will never come, or will come so tardily that it will not catch us. One of the dangers of debt is that it makes present possession so quick and easy and seems to put payment so far off. The wine cup wreathes itself with the same rosy deception. Its foam and sparkle and cheer are a present enjoyment, but a drunkard's grave is far away out of sight. The pleasure of sin is near and sure, but its penalty is distant and uncertain. Therefore we gaily float on its smooth, smiling stream and refuse to see and hear the dreadful cataract over which it pours.

This glittering falsehood as to the future is the devil's bait with which he decoys multitudes to destruction. A safeguard against it is the power and habit of looking ahead and considering the end. It is the farther end of every sin that we should consider most. The first end may be sweet: the last is bitter and will burn forever.

These Israelites, while they were putting far away the evil day, were causing "the seat of violence to come near." Their very indifference to judgment was drawing it towards them with swifter steps. Their blind and boastful reveling in sin was only hastening their ruin.

Floating with the current will not stop Niagara; shutting our eyes will not blow out the sun; plunging into sin and flattering ourselves that retribution is far off will not stop judgment or put out the fires of the bottomless pit.

4. Luxurious Ease and Gilded Vice

The prophet now depicts the painted sins of these luxurious Israelites in realistic colors. Upon their beds inlaid with ivory they stretched themselves in languid laziness and ease. Ordinary meat from the market was not tender enough for their tables, but the flocks were robbed of their lambs and the stalls of their calves that their dainty appetites might be gratified.

They wove around their pleasures the witchery of song and dance. They drank wine in bowls—ordinary cups and goblets would not do for them: they must have bowls in which they could drown themselves as in seas of wine. They guzzled down intoxicating drink in disgusting greediness. The costliest perfumed ointments were used to soften and scent their delicate flesh.

The whole description is a picture of luxurious sensual gratification and selfishness and is true to similar aspects of our modern life. We have been piling up wealth in our land in glittering heaps, compared with which all the wealth of these ancient cities was only a handful of dust, and out of this rich soil have been growing all the gorgeous blossoms and rank weeds of ease and luxury and voluptuousness.

We are noted as a pleasure-loving people and are growing mad for amusements. Palaces costing millions, but sometimes meretricious and vulgar, costly clothing and ostentatious adornments that are intended to excite envy rather than afford comfort, the search for excitement and pleasure, the disposition and effort to escape work and have an easy time, the constant craving for a crowd and itching for a new thrill, the dance hall and theater, the desire to turn all life into a picnic and moving-picture show—all these symptoms of our modern life may well excite our anxiety and alarm.

The same seeds of decay were rife in the Roman Empire: and great was the fall of it. Wealth that is lavished upon personal indulgence and luxury is a social waste. The rich have no right to drain off the productive resources of society to gratify their selfish tastes.

Such use of wealth breeds social discontent and sows the seeds of socialism and anarchy. Private wealth is a public trust and should be so used that it will serve the greatest good of the greatest number.

5. The Fateful Shadow of Coming Captivity

The prophet, having piled up this terrible indictment, now pronounces judgment: "Therefore shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed."

Captivity was an awful fate and fear to the Jews. The iron-hearted, stony-faced Assyrians, those dreadful oppressors of the East, were already beating against the borders of Israel and threatening to break through and carry its

inhabitants to their far-off prison beyond the great river. The Jews quailed in their hearts and became as dead men at this thought.

Amos plumped this judgment right at them. They would be pulled off their ivory couches and stripped of their embroidered robes and hurried away from their feasting and dancing and, fettered with chains, would march across a thousand miles of hot desert sand into ignominious and cruel captivity. All this came to pass thirty years later, for the Lord God had sworn it.

Captivity is the end of all sin. Whatever its form, whether it is pride or passion or wine, it enslaves mind and heart and will. It may put no chains on the hands, but it binds the soul in a bondage more abject and fatal than the slavemaster's lash. Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin; but if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

This preaching is no pious invention of the priest or church intended to frighten men into religious submission or servility. It is not taught in the Bibly only: it is taught just as plainly and solemnly in the daily newspaper; we may see many instances and terrible proofs of it in our newspaper every morning.

That sin poisons the blood and assassinates the brain and befouls the heart and binds body and soul in fetters stronger and more galling than steel is a truth that stares and stabs us in the face at every turn; and only fools will mock at this fact.

LESSON XII.—MARCH 19

THE DOWNFALL OF ISRAEL

How National Sins Are Punished

Golden Text: Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. Prov. 14:34.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 1.

Reference Material: Hosea, 7; Amos, 2:6–16.

Lesson Text: II Kings, 17:9–18

9 And the children of Israel did secretly *those* things that *were* not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

10 And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree:

11 And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as *did* the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger:

12 For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.

13 Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, *and by* all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments *and* my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.

14 Notwithstanding, they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God.

15 And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that *were* round about them, *concerning* whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them.

16 And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, *even* two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

17 And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

18 Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. Things Not Right.

2. The Corruption of Religion.

3. Sinning Against Light.

4. Hardening the Heart Against God.

5. The Retributive Result.

The splendid rottenness of the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam II ran its swift course to death. Assassination of kings spatters blood upon the pages of this history from Jeroboam II to Hoshea, the last king of Israel. Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, made Hoshea a vassal and, upon his revolt, took him captive and besieged Samaria.

On his death the terrible Sargon took up the siege, captured the city, and carried the ten tribes into captivity, where they are lost to view. The present lesson uncovers the roots that bore the scarlet blossom and bitter fruit of this captivity.

1. Things Not Right

The first point in the passage penetrates right down to the root of the whole matter. "The children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right."

Things not right! This is the cause of all our trouble. Right is the law of life, the root that can grow and bloom only into the beautiful and good. Right is the foundation of the universe and the eternal throne of God that cannot be shaken.

As long as we stand upon right, our spirits cannot be moved, though our mortal bodies may be ground to powder. But the moment we shift from the right to things not right, we slip from rock to sand. Though things not right may at first seem solid and promise security, yet they are sinking under us and in due time our feet shall slide.

The people of Israel thought they were having a good time while they were doing things not right, but all the while they were digging the grave of their captivity; and we may engage in the same business with the same result.

"The children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right." How they flattered themselves that their secrecy would cover up and hide their sin! How they congratulated themselves on their cleverness and laughed at the old fogies that followed the old-fashioned ways of righteousness! Let us draw the curtains of concealment about us, and give ourselves up to debauchery and shame: nobody will ever find it out! But they were reveling in a fool's paradise, and what to their blinded eyes seemed cloaked and shrouded in the darkest and most impenetrable night, was yet uncovered and exposed in the blazing light of day.

Sin loves secrecy. It has unbounded faith in the power of darkness to cover up and wipe out guilt. Evil doers seem to think that the wrong is not in doing things not right, but in being found out. They think that as night blots out all colors, so secrecy blots out all moral distinctions.

But the night is as the day to God and to every pure mind. What we do in secret shall at last be blazoned against us in the noonday. Some tell-tale sign or word or subtle change of feature will blab. Nature will turn against us and tell the dreadful secret. Let us not be so blind or foolish as to think that we can ever hide our sin, for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

2. The Corruption of Religion

The sin of Israel took the form of religious corruption.

They built high places for forbidden worship from the cities out to the most lonely tower of a watchman that guarded vineyards and flocks. They set up groves for Asherim that were carved pillars used in the licentious worship of the Phenician goddess Ashera. They burned incense in these high places, as did the heathen nations, and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger.

Thus the mountain tops of the holy land, that had been consecrated to Jehovah and that were to be kissed by the feet of the Son of God, smoked with the impure incense of licentious heathen worship.

The best things, when perverted, become the worst things. If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! Wealth, learning, art, all the appliances and achievements of our civilization, when wrongly used, become cunning and powerful instruments of evil.

Religion, being the highest means of good that may lift us to the loftiest summit of blessing, when corrupted may cast us down to the lowest depths of degradation.

3. Sinning Against Light

The people of Israel were without excuse, because the Lord had testified against them. They could not plead that they had lived in pagan darkness

and did not know better, for the Lord had sent them prophets from Moses down to their own day.

Had not Hosea exposed and scorched their sins with his burning words, and had not the rough but righteous cowherd of Tekoa denounced the sleek, scented sinners of Jerusalem and Samaria? Was not Isaiah even at this very time unburdening his great soul of its righteous indignation against them? They were constantly warned to turn from their evil ways and urged to keep the commandments of their fathers. So they were without excuse.

We are in the same condition with intensified light and responsibility. We have the testimony of the prophets, the Bible with light beaming from every page revealing the will and the ways of God.

We have the words of Jesus, who spake as never man spake and illuminated our life with heavenly light. Never have the children of men been more highly favored with truth and grace than we are. We have been born in the light and should walk in the day.

4. Hardening the Heart Against God

Over against this light that fell upon Israel is set their disobedience. They hardened their necks, a figure drawn from the stubbornness of oxen that will not accept and bear the yoke, but stiffen their necks against it. They rebelled against the Lord's statutes and would not have his law rule their life.

And this they did, not from the irresistible pull of heredity or the force of circumstances, but of their own free will. They were offered the good and they deliberately rejected it.

The root of our disobedience is always self-will. Let us not roll the blame of our evil doing off on our heredity or on the social order or on others, but take it home to our own bosoms where it was born and where it belongs.

The Israelites might have urged some reason for their rejection of Jehovah's commandments if they had found something better, but they followed vanity and became vain. They gave up God for idols, the Infinite for nothingness.

This is the bad bargain we always make when we exchange the soul for the world and God's will for our ways. In his righteous service we get something substantial and lasting, good fruits, solid character, life more abundant. But in our sinful ways we sow to

the wind and shall at last reap the whirlwind: emptiness and destruction raised to the second power.

The apostate Israelites not only did evil themselves, but they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, offering them up to idolatrous gods, and thus inflicted on them a horrible fate. Parents cannot sin without rolling evil consequences upon their children; the coils of their evil habits injure and may fetter the next generation.

The awful fires of sin that some parents kindle burn up their own sons and daughters. The final degradation of these idolaters is indicated in the fact that they "sold themselves to do evil." As men in ancient times could sell themselves into slavery, so these Israelites sold themselves into the slavery of sin. Once in, there was no getting out.

Men yet verily sell themselves to do evil by deliberately choosing wicked ways and fastening upon their souls the chains of evil habits that they cannot break. The slavery of sin is no fiction but a terrible fact, ever riveting its shackles tighter until its fetters become a finality which strong crying and tears cannot break.

5. The Retributive Results

The retributive result of all this evil is now set down. "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only." That is a logical and inevitable "therefore."

Never imagine that sin will stop with itself: there is always a "therefore" that comes after it. God never forgets and his justice never sleeps. The Lord was angry: anger is the other side of love and its possibility is always present in the Lord. The same mellow sunshine that sifts down through the air in silken softness and gently warms the world, when concentrated through a lens, becomes a fierce beam that will burn flesh and melt iron.

The Bible contains three definitions of God: "God is spirit"; "God is love"; "God is a consuming fire." This trinity of the divine nature involves no contradiction, for these three elements melt into unity, as caloric, luminiferous, and chemic waves blend into one white light.

God's anger against Israel was not blind passion that struck wild blows, but it expressed itself in logical action: he "removed them out of his sight." Is not this the necessary result of all sin?

> Sin works separation everywhere, introducing suspicion and strife into all social relations, splitting friendships and families and societies and nations apart, and working disruption and enmity. As sin drives a wedge of separation in between man and man, much more does it do so between man and God. It unfits the soul for fellowship with God and sends it out in disgrace from his presence. "Ever to be with the Lord" is heaven, "removed out of his sight" is hell.

So ended the ten tribes whose splendid wickedness lighted their way down into final captivity and extinction. "There was none left," and yet there was still one root in the cleft of the Judean rocks that might again grow and bloom, for Judah remained as the hope of the nation and out of this stalk at length came the Messiah.

The downfall of Israel in view of its whole history is seen to have been no accident or blind fate, but the long and slow outgrowth and retribution of righteous and inexorable moral law. This kingdom was born in rebellion and at once adopted a false and immoral religion and persistently trod the way of political intrigue and social corruption, and was thus from the beginning heading towards the precipice over which it at last plunged as irresistibly as Niagara, having arrived at its brink, could be arrested by no human power but must go thundering down.

> Nations as truly as individuals are subject to moral laws, and the wages of national transgression is death. History is a vast graveyard, and on its tombstones is carved the ever repeated epitaph: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Let us not think that our own nation is above this law.

LESSON XIII.—MARCH 26

REVIEW: THE NORTHERN KINGDOM'S RISE AND FALL

Social Teachings of the Quarter's Lessons

Golden Text: The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. Psalm, 145:17.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 130.

PLAN OF REVIEW

1. ***The Northern Kingdom of Israel.***
2. ***Baal Worship and the Prophet Elijah.***
3. ***The Prophet Elisha.***
4. ***The Message of the Book of Jonah.***
5. ***The Last Days of the Northern Kingdom.***
6. ***The Social Teachings of the Quarter.***

The lessons of the quarter extend from the division of the monarchy under Rehoboam, B. C. 937, to the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel under Hoshea, B. C. 722, a period of two hundred and fifteen years.

1. The Northern Kingdom of Israel

The disruption of the kingdom took place in a day, but the causes leading up to it had long been at work. An earthquake that shakes a continent and destroys cities may last only a few minutes, but the deep-seated pressure that finally gave way may have been accumulating for centuries.

One cause of the division of the Hebrew monarchy was the jealousy among the tribes, chiefly of Ephraim against Judah. Ephraim by reason of its central position and large size and especially by reason of its having furnished many of the famous leaders of former days, was disaffected and angered by the rise of Judah into dominance under David.

> **Such sectional divergences are likely to grow up in a nation and have been a frequent cause of division, as we have experienced in our own country.**

The burden of taxation was the immediate and avowed cause of complaint. Magnificent buildings and public works and royal establishments maintained

in great luxury cost heavily, and such burdens always fall on the people. These embers of discontent had long been smoldering among the northern tribes, and when Rehoboam blew the hot breath of insolent tyranny upon them they burst into flames which nothing could stop.

But deeper than all these human causes was the plan and guidance of the divine will. "Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the Lord" (I Kings, 12:15.) Though human error and pride were working to bring about this division, the divine permission and purpose were also working in and through these to bring about some better result.

It is always so in history. After human causes have been tabulated and explained there remains the deepest cause of all, the divine purpose.

Victor Hugo enumerates several apparently trivial causes that might have thrown victory to Napoleon at Waterloo, and then says: "Was it possible for Napoleon to win the battle? We answer in the negative. Why? On account of Wellington, on account of Blücher? No; on account of God. Bonaparte, victor at Waterloo, did not harmonize with the law of the nineteenth century. Napoleon had been denounced in infinitude, and his fall was decided. Waterloo was not a battle, but a transformation of the universe."

"This thing is from me" (I Kings, 12:24) is God's explanation and the final philosophy of every event. This does not make God responsible for evil, but only keeps evil from thwarting God and allows him to overrule evil for good.

2. Baal Worship and the Prophet Elijah

Jeroboam was the strong leader who disrupted the monarchy and established the northern kingdom. He was succeeded by his son Nadab, who reigned two years and was assassinated by Baasha, who was succeeded by his son Elah; he was assassinated while drunk by Zimri, who lasted only seven days and lighted his own funeral pile by setting fire to his palace and perishing in its flames.

Omri, the next to occupy the throne, was one of the great kings of Israel, and he was succeeded by his son Ahab, who made his name infamous in the history of the northern kingdom. Jeroboam's golden calves had now degenerated into crass idolatry, and Ahab adopted and gloried in the most shameless forms of heathen worship. The lowest depth of degradation was reached

when Ahab married Jezebel and she openly established the worship of Baal in Israel.

There are epochs in the history of true religion when its very life is at stake.

Elijah was the man of the hour who saved the day. This great prophet comes upon the scene suddenly, and all his appearances in this history are like the flashes of meteors across the night sky. He was probably a swarthy man, a child of the deserts and forests of Gilead, clothed in a mantle bound around his waist with a leather strap, austere in his habits and given to solitude and meditation. His soul grieved over the degeneracy of the time, its unrighteous money-getting, its luxury and ease, and its idolatry and immorality.

Ahab, under the influence of Jezebel, was the head and front of all the false worship and wickedness, and Elijah made straight for him. Meeting him face to face he launched at him a thunderbolt of divine judgment in the form of a drought and famine. He then disappeared from public view during the famine and suddenly reappeared for the dramatic scene that was staged on Mount Carmel.

His startling triumph on that occasion was followed by collapse at Jezebel's threat and his flight to the wilderness, where in his despondency he thought he was the only good man left and imagined he wanted to die. But the Lord ministered to him and opened his eyes to the large unconscious influence he was wielding and sent him back to his work.

Elijah anointed Elisha as his successor and was then carried up to heaven in a chariot of fire, a fitting departure for the fiery prophet. He was a cleansing fire in idolatrous Israel, an early John the Baptist who helped to prepare the way for the coming of the Light of the world. "Enoch has no tomb; Moses has no shroud; Elijah has no setting to the sun of his chariot."

3. The Prophet Elisha

Elisha appears after the translation of Elijah as "Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah" (II Kings, 3:11). He is thus introduced as a mere servant of the greater prophet, a relation which he himself would have regarded as a sufficient honor for him. He was not so much an inferior as a different man compared with his master, of a quieter temper and fitted to do a different work. He was a minister of healing, though also some sparks of fire were emitted from him.

The incident of the Shunammite woman and the restoring to life of her child is one of the beautiful stories of the Bible that make it dear to childhood and motherhood the world over. The northern kingdom of Israel was exposed to the great empires of Syria and Assyria that were such a fateful cloud overhanging both the Hebrew kingdoms, and Elisha lived in a time when the first waves of this vast sea were beginning to break on the borders of his country.

The visit of Naaman, the Syrian general, to Elisha to be cured of his leprosy, is another beautiful Bible story, illustrating the ministry of a little girl, the disease and cure of the leprosy of sin, and the exercise of a just and humane spirit as the true way of dealing with national and racial prejudices.

Elisha again came into contact with the Syrians when they came to capture him, and his unveiling the vision of the mountain all alive and aflame with the horses and chariots of God is an illustration of the faith in the unseen resources of God that should sustain and inspire us.

4. The Message of the Book of Jonah

This beautiful little tract on the wideness of God's mercy and the duty of foreign missions, which is inserted in the heart of the Old Testament, contains many lessons.

The disobedience of the prophet and his vain flight show us how futile and disastrous disobedience will prove in our lives.

The heathen sailors in their treatment of the runaway prophet are noble illustrations of pagan piety and human kindness. The bravery of Jonah in proclaiming his message to the hostile city is a stimulating example for us, but his displeasure and complaint when the city was not destroyed by divine judgment show us the narrowness and blindness of sectarian and national bigotry.

The great and splendid message of the book is its exhibition of the universal love of God. God is the God of the whole earth, and no people or race or individual is outside of his providence and mercy. Repentance is acceptable to him from any human heart. He has no favorites in the sense that he grants his grace to some and shuts others out from his mercy, for " God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh

righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts, 10:34–35). The book is a grand foreign missionary tract and spreads the breadth and brightness of divine mercy over the whole world.

5. The Last Days of the Northern Kingdom

The causes of the decline and fall of the northern kingdom are written broadly over this whole history, and the Hebrew writer sums them up in one pregnant sentence: "The children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God." There is no disposition to hide or palliate the true causes of this fall, but they are exposed and condemned with terrible vividness and power.

Isaiah and Hosea, who lived in the days immediately preceding this event, foresaw and predicted the fall and described it with dramatic realism. Amos, the farmer-prophet, pours out his sarcastic scorn and invective against the rich, sleek sinners of Jerusalem and Samaria. Religious degeneracy had wrought itself out into all the fruits of wickedness, and Samaria was reeling in its drunkenness towards its inevitable doom.

Such is the effect of religious decline and degradation in all ages and countries. France had her Revolution, and the same moral and political catastrophe will sooner or later overtake every nation that forgets God. Faith in God as the righteous ruler of the nation is a necessary foundation of national stability and welfare, and when this foundation is undermined the whole structure will crumble and fall into ruin.

All these ancient empires were lighted down into their graves by the torches of their own wickedness, and it is still written in the laws of national life that the nation that forgets God shall perish.

6. The Social Teachings of the Quarter

This ancient history deals with the same social problems that perplex and imperil our modern world.

Jerusalem and Samaria are mirrors in which we can see London and New York.

The unrest of industrial conditions and the problem of the social order, the relations of poverty and wealth, and the problems precipitated by the prejudice and friction caused by the contact of different races and nations, all these and other questions were troubling these ancient nations just as they are now dis-

turbing and at times convulsing our modern world. Social injustice was one root of the condition of affairs in Israel. Oppression of the poor by the rich, bribery and corruption, had built those palaces in Samaria and furnished them in scarlet and ivory and gold. Every carved ivory bed was paid for by the extorted pittances of the poor, every silken robe and cushion was dyed red in the blood of the oppressed.

The cry of social injustice has gone up in every age and from every land, and it is being heard in ominous tones to-day.

At this point we should be careful not to indulge in indiscriminate condemnation of the rich. Men may, and many of them do, get rich honestly, rendering service for value received, or inheriting wealth from those who have rightly earned it. It is wrong and a veritable crime to stir up unjust class hatred and thereby sow seeds of social unrest and revolution.

Nevertheless, we should see and speak out against all forms of social injustice, and seek to correct them by every legitimate means. This is a large and complicated subject and calls for careful and discriminating discussion.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND QUARTER

The lessons of the Second Quarter trace the history of the southern kingdom of Judah running parallel with the northern kingdom of Israel and extend from the division of the monarchy under Rehoboam, in B. C. 937, to the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in B. C. 586.

Twenty-one kings sat on the throne of Judah during this period. The record of Judah is religiously and politically better than that of Israel as it had some strong and noble kings and maintained the worship of Jehovah and observed the law of Moses and was instructed and inspired by the great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.

Yet it also became infected with idolatry and had its share of political intrigue and sank into social corruption, ending in the complete destruction of the capital city and the deportation of the inhabitants to Babylon.

The main object of this study is the application of the principles of these lessons to our own day and duties. We are not studying the Bible as a purely intellectual subject or merely with historical or archæological interest, though it does abound in such interest, but as living truth that enters vitally into our character and conduct. No other book of history is so modern and so holds its mirror up to show us what we ought to avoid and what we should be and do.

While this personal application should not be made too prominent and pushed to the point where it might grow repellent or distasteful to the class, yet it should ever be in the background of the teaching and should on proper occasions come forward into the foreground. These applications are both individual and sociological. They show us how religious truth and duty affect the personal life, bringing upon it the retribution of sin and the blessing of righteousness, and then they show us how such truth works in society for its organic degeneration or redemption.

The social application of Biblical truth is now being newly emphasized, and out of this Book are issuing the streams of modern progress that in so many ethical ways are working for the regeneration of human society. We are now interested not only in having good citizens, but also in having a good city; not only in having holy souls, but also in having wholesome circumstances. The soul of

improvement is the improvement of the soul, and this principle is first to be applied in getting better souls and then in creating a better environment.

Some of the individual and sociological applications of these lessons are suggested in these pages, but the teacher should be on the lookout for them and find and make such applications of his own.

SECOND QUARTER

Prophets and Kings in Judah (Southern Kingdom)

LESSON I.—APRIL 2

ASA RELIES ON GOD

The Source of Personal and National Power

Golden Text: Help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee. II Chron. 14:11

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 145:1–10.

Reference Material: II Chron. 14:13–16; Isaiah, 41:10–13.

Lesson Text: II Chronicles, 14:1–12

So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead. In his days the land was quiet ten years.
2 And Asa did *that which was* good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God:
3 For he took away the altars of the strange *gods*, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves:
4 And commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment.
5 Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the images: and the kingdom was quiet before him.
6 ¶ And he built fenced cities in Judah: for the land had rest, and he had no war in those years; because the LORD had given him rest.
7 Therefore he said unto Judah, Let us build these cities, and make about *them* walls and towers, gates and bars, *while* the land *is* yet before us; because we have sought the LORD our God, we have sought *him*, and he hath given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered.
8 And Asa had an army *of men* that bare targets and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and fourscore thousand: all these *were* mighty men of valour.
9 ¶ And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with a host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah.
10 Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.
11 And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, *it is* nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou *art* our God; let not man prevail against thee.
12 So the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *A Good Start.*
2. *Negative Destruction.*
3. *Positive Construction.*
4. *Peace and Work in the Land.*
5. *A Great Victory.*

The lessons now pass from the north to the south and trace the parallel history of the southern kingdom. Judah had a more stable government than Israel and maintained a purer religious and social life, and yet it also proved apostate and degenerate and finally went the same way of captivity.

Rehoboam, the first king of Judah, whose reactionary policy and personal insolence disrupted the monarchy, was succeeded by his son Abijah, and he by his son Asa, who reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem, while seven kings ran their brief and generally troubled and tragic careers in Samaria.

1. A Good Start

The new king starts off well. "And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God." How much better that reads than the record that "the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right."

It is always important to start well. Well begun is half done. Youth especially should begin by laying such foundation stones as will last.

"Good and right" are such stones. God himself builds on these foundations, these are the eternal marble of his great white throne. We can adopt no better rule of life than that we will do only that which is good and right. Such a life will never fall to pieces of its own rottenness, but it will stand solid and beautiful through all the years. When we do that which is good and right we need not trouble ourselves about the consequences: they will take care of themselves; and they will be good and right also.

Better do that which is good and right than that which is great and rich.

But how shall we know what is good and right? Is not this the dispute of all the ages? David knew the answer to this question. "Who will show us

any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us" (Psalm, 4:6). Asa also knew, for he did that which is good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. The Lord knows what is good and right and he has told us. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."

Amidst all the confusion of human thought and speech, "the dust of systems and of creeds," there is one Teacher whose words we can trust, following whom we shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

2. Negative Destruction

Asa's reformation first took the form of the negative, clearing out the false worship. "For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves." This abominable, licentious, heathen worship had entrenched itself in the high places of Judah and its foul smoke polluted the blue Syrian sky and smelled to heaven. It was so deeply rooted in the flesh and was so gratifying to fallen human nature that it was no easy task to uproot and destroy it. Powerful interests were enlisted in its favor and this reform called for courage and might.

The false faith had not only infected "lewd fellows of the baser sort," but had also crept far up into the highest circles. The king's own mother was guiltiest of all, for "she had made an idol in a grove."

But the king did not hesitate to remove her from being queen and "cut down her idol, and stamped it, and burnt it in the brook Kidron" (Ch. 15:16). He thus began his judgment in his own house and then carried it out through the borders of his kingdom. Great things may be expected of a youth who begins thus, and Asa fulfilled the promise of his early years.

Reform must begin by rooting up evil. Thorns and weeds must be cleared out of the ground before the wheat can be planted. If we would worship the Lord our God, we must break up our idols and burn them to ashes. We cannot serve God and mammon. With the world in our hearts, God must stay out.

We cannot keep the old sins and get the new life. Our sinfulness will forever stand in the way of our saintliness unless we give it up and cast it out. We must cease to do evil, and then we can learn to do well.

3. Positive Construction

Negative action, however, is only half the work of reform and must be complemented and completed by positive action. Asa did not take away the high places and images from the people of Judah without giving them something better. He "commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law and the commandment." The same powers of faith and devotion they had spent in serving idols were to be spent in serving the Lord.

The Lord must be sought. Though he is not far from any one of us and never hides himself from anybody, yet we must open our hearts to him in desire, or we shall not find him.

The king touched a responsive chord in the hearts of his people that had long been silent when he urged them to seek the Lord God of their fathers. Our Fathers' God! There is music in that memory.

Our ancestral faith, hallowed by all the comfort and charm of the past, should bring us back from our wandering to the old ways of worship.

The people were not only to seek the Lord, but also to do the law and commandment. Their reformation was to start in desire, but it was to end in deeds done. Worship must complete itself in work. The commandment is to be no mere profession of the lips or paper-creed, but a living force that beats in the blood and shapes our life into the likeness of God.

This negative destruction and positive construction in reform are not two independent and successive processes, but they are the two sides of the same work and begin and proceed together. We do not empty the air out of a glass and then pour the water in; neither do we pour the water in and then empty out the air; but we do the two things at the same time and as the water goes in the air goes out.

No heart is ever emptied of evil before good goes in; if it were swept empty of devils, other devils would come in and leave its last state worse than its first; but as the good goes in the evil goes out. The way to get evil out of your heart is to crowd good in.

Men make a mistake when they try to reform themselves or the community or the nation by simply driving out sins: they can force sins out only by putting something better in their place. The heart

abhors a vacuum and must have something, and it will keep the evil until it gets the good. The only way to get loose from the devil is to lay hold of God. We can cease to do evil only by learning to do good.

4. Peace and Work in the Land

Under Asa's reformation the land had rest and peace. The Lord gave Judah rest and for ten years peace unfurled its banner over its hills and valleys. In those ancient times when war was the almost constant business of the world, this breathing spell was an unusual blessing.

Asa employed it to good purpose. Instead of relaxing his energies and spending his substance in riotous living, he said, "Let us build these cities, and make about them walls and towers, gates and bars, while the land is yet before us." He built up and protected his cities and thus got ready for invasion and attack. He foresaw the day of trial and prepared for it.

Asa was thus not simply a destroyer, tearing things down, but he was an architect, building things up. He tore down heathen pillars, but he put up fenced cities. His destruction was in order to construction.

Everyone has fenced cities to build. There are the home, the school, the church, the nation, the world: each one of these is a city which needs to be built up and walled against enemies.

The gospel is a wall of righteousness that we should build around all these cities. Upright character, honest service, education, temperance, the Bible, the Sabbath, worship, these are so many towers and gates and bars that we should build up in strength and safety and beauty.

Look well to your wall and see that it contains no breach through which an enemy can come in; go round about your towers and examine every gate and bar. Build yourself into a strong city. Your day of trial is coming: get ready for it.

Asa also had an army of men that were armed with targets and spears and shields and bows, mighty men of valor. The nation grew teeth and claws. These men of faith could fight. The greatest security of peace at times has been tremendous preparation for war.

War sometimes but not always is God's Arm of righteousness. Alas, that this grim and terrible necessity should still be upon us. It

has surely served its rough purpose in the world and should now give way to more rational and brotherly means of settling national and international difficulties.

May God hasten the time and help us to bring in the day when men will build the Parliament of man and beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks, turning all their engines of destruction into instruments of peaceful production and plenty.

There is one kind of armor that we never should lay aside but should always keep it burnished and bright and in action: the whole armor of God.

5. A Great Victory

Asa's day of trial soon came. A great swarm of black Ethiopians came up out of Egypt like clouds of locusts against Judah and threatened to devour the land. Asa went out against them and down in the valley of Zephathah the battle was set in array. The vast multitude of the Ethiopians promised to them a speedy victory that would overwhelm the army of Asa, but there was a Helper on the side of Judah the Ethiopians could not see.

Asa made his appeal to the Lord his God in a simple, trustful, sublime prayer. He realized his helplessness in the presence of that great black host and threw himself upon the omnipotence of God. That prayer armed him with the courage and might of his faith. Inspired with the conviction that God would deliver his land, he hurled his compact, thoroughly-disciplined army against the vast horde of the Ethiopians and they were soon a disorganized rout.

The battle is not always with the strong: God has something to say about it.

Captain Philip, of the Texas, after the capture of the Cristobal Colon, in the Spanish-American war, called his men to the quarter-deck, and with bared head said: "I want to make public acknowledgment here that I believe in God the Father Almighty. I want all you officers and men to lift your hats and from your hearts offer silent thanks to the Almighty."

Foch had the same faith and so had multitudes of the officers and men in the Great War.

May this soldierly faith inspire us in the great battle of life; for this is the victory that overcometh the world.

LESSON II.—APRIL 9

THE LORD PRESERVES JOASH

The Secret of Personal and National Safety

Golden Text: The Lord preserveth all them that love him. Psalm, 145:20.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 145:10–21.

Reference Material: II Kings, 11:18–20; II Chron. 23:1–21; Matt. 2:13–23.

Lesson Text: II Kings, 11:1–4, 11–17

And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal.

2 But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons *which were* slain; and they hid him, *even* him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain.

3 And he was with her hid in the house of the LORD six years. And Athaliah did reign over the land.

4 ¶ And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard, and brought them to him into the house of the LORD, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the LORD, and shewed them the king's son.

11 And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king, from the right corner of the temple to the left corner of the temple, *along* by the altar and the temple.

12 And he brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and *gave him* the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king.

13 ¶ And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard *and* of the people, she came to the people into the temple of the LORD.

14 And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pillar, as the manner *was*, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets: and Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, Treason, treason.

15 But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges; and him that followeth her kill with the sword. For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the house of the LORD.

16 And they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house: and there was she slain.

17 ¶ And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, that they should be the LORD'S people; between the king also and the people.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***A Child Preserved by Providence.***
2. ***A Young King Called to the Throne.***
3. ***Let Everyone Do His Duty.***
4. ***The Coronation of the King.***
5. ***The Testimony Put in His Hands.***
6. ***The Anointing of the King.***
7. ***A Wicked Woman Slain.***

We are here introduced into the darkest period of the history of Judah.

Jehoshaphat, the son and successor of Asa and himself a good king of Judah, had made the mistake of marrying his son Joram to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, the king of Israel, and of Jezebel, his wicked Phenician wife. Athaliah was able to infect Judah with the licentious Baal worship as her mother had infected Israel.

Joram, who succeeded his father Jehoshaphat, was succeeded by his son Ahaziah, who, after a reign of one year, was slain by Jehu, successor of Ahab and king of Israel, who was making a clean sweep of Baal worshipers.

1. A Child Preserved by Providence

This left Athaliah to take possession of the throne. She had all the masculine courage and fierce ambition of her mother Jezebel and was ready to use every murderous means to attain her end.

In order that she might hold the throne she determined to put all possible claimants out of the way, and so she ruthlessly destroyed all the seed royal, including her own grandchildren. One grandchild, however, was preserved from her relentless wrath. Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram and sister of Ahaziah and the wife of Jehoiada the high priest, secretly stole Joash, an infant son of Ahaziah, and hid him away in care of a nurse in a room in the temple, where he was kept secluded for six years.

Thus Providence watched over this child and kept it for its great future. With a powerful and malignant tigress seeking its life it was yet secure. No evil could come nigh it, even as in a later time another Child was kept from the furious jealousy of King Herod, who thrust his sword through every cradle in Bethlehem after the Child had escaped.

Every child is in a sense under the watch and care of Providence. The little children of the world are precious to the great Father. All children also are exposed to evil and to enemies. There are environments, companions, books, that are contamination and death to children.

We should save the little ones. As far as possible we should shield them from evil influences and train them up in purity and strength of character.

2. A Young King Called to the Throne

At length the time came when the young king should be put upon his throne. When he was seven years old the high priest (his uncle by marriage) took action. He called the captains of the royal guards into the temple, showed them the king's son, and made a solemn covenant with them and took an oath of them. These captains and soldiers were evidently faithful worshipers of Jehovah and could be trusted.

This movement was started and sealed in the house of God and was a religious reformation. We should beware of any scheme that we cannot take into the church and start with the divine blessing.

These captains were to station part of their men around the royal residence to prevent anyone from going out or in that would interfere with the plan, and part were to be stationed around the temple to guard the new king. Orders were given the officers to slay anyone who attempted to pass within the ranks of the guards.

The high priest was a man of foresight and plan. He knew how to arrange a campaign and handle soldiers. He did not simply depend on divine action, but he used human means and also depended on himself. The priest must sometimes be a soldier and know how to fight.

All Christian workers are engaged in a campaign and should study means and know how to marshal forces and use the proper weapons. We wrestle not with flesh and blood only, but with spiritual hosts of wickedness, and we should have on the whole armor of God.

3. Let Everyone Do His Duty

The captains gave their commands and the soldiers wheeled into their places. "And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand,

round about the king." That is the true soldierly attitude, prepared and expectant.

Everyone should stand in that attitude in his place of duty: to shoot, if shooting is his duty; to work, if working is his task; to teach or preach or pray, if that is his calling. Too many men are standing around with no weapon or tool in their hands.

The priest now delivered to the captains "king David's spears and shields, that were in the temple of the Lord" (verse 10). This was a deeply significant act and masterly stroke of policy. It armed these men with King David's weapons. How their hearts would thrill and what excitement and inspiration would surge through them as their hands touched these historic spears and shields! It was as though David himself were come back to them and was fighting with them. This meant that their cause was David's cause, they were about to revive the same worship that David established, they were going to be true to his faith.

Let us keep our fathers' weapons in our hands. We have to fight the same enemies and battles they fought, and we cannot find better weapons than they used.

The Word of God and prayer, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, what weapons are these? Our fathers used them, and we should have them in our hands and win the victory.

4. The Coronation of the King

Jehoiada now brought the boy king out and the coronation ceremony was performed. A crown was put on his head, the testimony was put in his hands, and he was anointed. Then the people clapped their hands and shouted, "God save the king."

These are the essentials in crowning a king in Christian countries to this day, and they have come down to us from this ancient time. It is proper that kings should thus be crowned and inducted into their high office.

It is no part of our republican theory and form of government to disparage and ridicule the royal form. All the great historic forms of government have their place and use, and each is to be honored in its place. "Honor the king," says Paul, and the advice is still good for this age.

We are proud of our constitutional republic, and this is the highest type of government, but it would not suit and would not work among all the peoples of the world. As Christians, however, we are all kings unto God and are to be crowned.

Joash received a crown, possibly a bejeweled circlet of gold, but every one of us should wear a crown of righteousness that is far more precious and more radiant than any crown of gold, though it be thickly encrusted with gems. The jewels that should shine in our crown are truth and trust, righteousness and reverence, self-control, purity and patience and peace, goodness and gentleness, kindness and courtesy, sympathy and service and sacrifice. These make a crown more beautiful and splendid than any diadem ever worn by king or queen, and everyone of us, however poor and humble, can win and wear it.

5. The Testimony Put in His Hands

Into the young king's hands they put the testimony. This doubtless was the law of Moses, the Bible so far as they yet had it.

The king also is subject to law. He cannot set up his own arbitrary will as the law of the kingdom, he cannot simply do as he pleases, but he is himself bound by the testimony and must carry out its requirements. For attempting to rule without obeying "the testimony" some kings have lost their kingdoms and some have lost their heads.

If the king is thus bound to observe "the testimony," much more are we. The same testimony that was put into the hands of young Joash is put, enlarged and enriched, into our hands. The Bible is the great book of testimony for king and subject, president and citizen, alike. It lays down the fundamental constitution and laws for the kingdom of the human soul. In keeping its commandments there is great reward; but whosoever hates its requirements loves death.

Every boy should have this testimony placed in his hands; and so should every girl and man and woman. Not only should we have it in our hands, but we should also have it written in our hearts, wrought into the texture of our habits and disposition so that it will be our spirit and speech and in all our thoughts and ways we shall keep its laws.

6. The Anointing of the King

The young king was also anointed. The oil of anointing signified that Joash was set apart to the kingly office, and it also symbolized the divine grace with which he was endued for this service. Kings are set apart to their calling just as prophets are; and they need a special enduement of divine grace to enable them to discharge their duties.

All Christians, being kings unto God, need this same anointing. Everyone is set apart to his special calling, whether as minister or teacher or professional man or business man or common laborer. Every true line of work is a divine calling, as certainly as the ministry, and is to be entered upon and fulfilled as such.

Everyone also needs a special anointing with the oil of grace that he may be enabled to do his work in the most efficient way with the divine help. Our work is just as important in our place as is the king's work in his high place, and we should strive to be prepared for it and to be faithful in it.

7. A Wicked Woman Slain

When Athaliah heard the shouting in connection with the coronation she rushed out of her palace, and when she saw the young king wearing his crown and took in the situation, she began frantically crying, "Treason, treason!" Jehoiada made quick work with her. At his command the soldiers seized her, hurried her off to the horses' gate or the horse stables of the palace and smothered her cries in her blood.

This was the way such things were done in that age; and some parts of the world have not yet advanced beyond this stage and process, and the pathetic cries of a Russian king and queen, hurried to their assassination together with their children, have hardly yet died out of our ears. Athaliah embodied wickedness that was highly infectious and that had to be stamped out in death.

We do not now resort to such means of purifying religion and politics, but sin is still just as dangerous and deadly to the soul and its wages are still inevitable death in our modern world.

LESSON III.—APRIL 16

THE LOVE OF JOASH FOR GOD'S HOUSE

Why and How to Maintain Public Worship

Golden Text: I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Psalm, 122:1.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 122:1–9.

Reference Material: II Sam. 7:1–13; I Kings, 6:1–14; II Chron. 24; Luke, 4:16.

Lesson Text: II Kings, 11:21–12:7–15

21 Seven years old *was* Jehoash when he began to reign.

7 Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the *other* priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now therefore receive no *more* money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house.

8 And the priests consented to receive no *more* money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house.

9 But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the LORD: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money *that was* brought into the house of the LORD.

10 And it was *so*, when they saw that *there was* much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money that was found in the house of the LORD.

11 And they gave the money, being told, into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the LORD: and they laid it out to the carpenters and builders, that wrought upon the house of the LORD.

12 And to masons, and hewers of stone, and to buy timber and hewed stone to repair the breaches of the house of the LORD, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair *it*.

13 Howbeit there were not made for the house of the LORD bowls of silver, snuffers, basins, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money *that was* brought into the house of the LORD:

14 But they gave that to the workmen, and repaired therewith the house of the LORD.

15 Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. A House of Worship Out of Repair.

2. A Plan That Failed.

3. A New Plan That Worked.

4. A Restored House of Worship.

The boy Joash (or Jehoash), having been placed upon the throne at the age of seven years, "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him." The record reads well and promises much, and it shows the influence of a good priest in a kingdom and on a king.

Any kingdom or country is stronger and safer in which worthy ministers of religion exercise their proper influence upon the rulers and people.

Yet Jehoiada was a man of his age and did not rise to the level of our Christian ideas on the marriage relation, for he took for Joash "two wives" (II Chron. 24:3), which was one too many, and furthermore Jehoiada did not see to it that the idolatrous worship was destroyed and "the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in high places."

These remaining roots of evil grew into such strength that in time they overtopped and smothered the true worship, and Joash's long reign, that began with such bright prospects, ended in the deepest degradation and in a terrible tragedy.

1. A House of Worship Out of Repair

Joash started his public administration promisingly by giving orders to "repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found." The fact that the temple was in sore need of repair showed that true religion was on the decline. Baal worship was in the ascendency. Popular interest ran towards sensual heathen rites, and the temple was left comparatively deserted and neglected. This neglect doubtless was seen in littered courts, cracked walls and decayed or broken cedar beams.

The sons of Athaliah, also, had desecrated the house of Jehovah and robbed it of its treasures to enrich the house of Baal (II Chron. 24:7). The temple that had been the pride of Solomon and the glory of the nation was now in a shamefully dilapidated condition.

The inner decline of faith soon shows itself in outer decay. When the heart slows its beat, the very finger-tips lose their color and vigor. A neglected house of worship is a bad religious symptom. Ragged carpets and discolored walls, broken window panes and leaky roof are finger-tips that show the heart is not in good health. There needs to be new blood up in the pulpit or a new spirit down in the pews.

The king gathered together the priests and Levites and started them out to collect money for the work of repair. He organized the undertaking and gave to every man his work.

It takes money to do religious work, and the church must have it. The church on its financial side is a business concern and should be conducted on business principles. Yet this business side is not a mere worldly accessory of the church, as some people appear to think, but is one form of its worship. Religious conviction must not remain an abstract conception, but must be minted into solid coin. A church that is repaired and not paid for may be a worse blot upon religion than a church out of repair.

The king's plan was to throw out a net that would gather money "of all Israel" (II Chron. 24:5). A few rich Jews were not to pay for this work, but everyone was to give something. Yet the subscription was not to be collected all at once, but it was an annual contribution that was to be paid "from year to year."

It is often better in raising money thus to divide the burden and bear a portion at a time. The weekly subscription plan for the support of the church has the advantage that it is generally easier to give a small sum every week than a large sum once a year.

The king thus showed a good spirit and motive in the start of his reign and cut out his work on a wise plan.

2. A Plan That Failed

Yet the plan did not work. Years afterward "the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house," for "the Levites hastened it not."

That is not all ancient history, but is frequently reproduced in our experience. The pastor may be active and urgent, wise to plan and quick to start, but the elders or trustees are sluggish and slow. There may be a bright and enterprising man or woman in the church who sees the need of repair or an improvement in the church work or an opportunity for a forward movement, but the congregation drags and holds the matter back. Money is to be raised and collectors are started out with subscription papers, but little progress is made and the movement slows down and may stop. There are usually enough Levites in the average congregation to hang as a heavy weight on the chariot wheels of a church and make them go slow.

A wise plan is not enough: there must be energy to push it. An able leader is not the only need: there must be faithful workers to follow. The pastor cannot do the work of the church: the people must take hold and carry it through.

Raising money was slow business among these Jews even for the repair of their splendid temple, and we need not be surprised to meet the same discouragements in the same line. The pocketbook is often the last part of a man to be converted and we must give it time to catch and become soaked with the grace of God.

When Joash found the matter moving slowly he set about finding the reason. He sent for Jehoiada, the chief priest, and called him to account; he went to the root of the delay by finding the man that was chiefly responsible. The young king put a sharp question to the aged priest when he asked him why he had not repaired the house.

When a good work is moving slowly or not moving at all, somebody is not doing his duty and some commandment is not being kept. It would be well for us in such circumstances not to wait until we are sent for, but to inquire, "Is it I?"

3. A New Plan That Worked

The king, having failed with one plan, tried another. He directed the priest to provide a chest with a hole in the lid—the first money box of which we read—and had it placed at the gate of the temple. A proclamation was then published throughout Judah that the taxes imposed by Moses and voluntary contributions should be brought and dropped through the hole in the lid into the box.

The new plan was a great success. It was a novelty with the people and it caught their fancy. They experienced a kind of childish delight in dropping their shekels through the hole and hearing them rattle in the box. And then, too, they saw their money go into the king's chest and not into the priests' hands and knew it would be used in the repair of the temple.

Popular interest was aroused and grew into national enthusiasm. "All the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end," or had enough. The plan appealed to the popular mind. Thus king Joash, when his first plan for raising money failed, did not abandon his enterprise and leave the temple in dilapidation, but by

a simple change of method which kindled the imagination of his people, he gained his object.

In a good work, if one plan fails let us try another; and if we can hit upon some device or novelty that will catch the people and put them in a good humor, it will be all the better for that. Some pastors and Sunday school superintendents and teachers have a genius for such devices and this is one secret of their success.

People are only children of a larger growth and have a childish delight in novelty. When we are led to rejoice in a good work, it is bound to go through.

Every day the money was counted by the king's scribe and the high priest's secretary and emptied into a bag, which was then sealed and put away. The money was thus counted and kept by the proper officers in such a way as to avoid all suspicion of improper management of the finances.

This point needs to be carefully watched in all our churches. No church should neglect proper safeguards and checks, and the more honest a church officer is the more he should insist upon them.

The pastor had better let the money alone, and the officers that handle it should conduct their business with such publicity as will prevent all appearance of wrong.

4. A Restored House of Worship

The work of repair was now begun and carried through. They did not repair the temple and raise the money afterward, and thus have a debt to hang over them for years to bind and clog their progress; but they first raised the money and then did the work.

The young king and the aged priest now worked together in delightful harmony, hiring carpenters and masons and workers in iron and brass. "So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them" (II Chron. 24:13).

These workmen did not slight or skimp or botch their work; they did not work only when the foreman was around and loaf when he was away; they did not simply put in their time and draw their pay; but they worked and perfected their work. Everything was done after the best workmanship of their craft, built solidly and of the best materials and shaped up and put together with the nicest fit and the finest finish.

These temple-builders were no slovenly workers rendering mere eye-service,

but they were skillful and conscientious workmen whose work was their worship. When anything was done by them it was well done and would stay done and did not need to be done over again. When they turned the keys of the repaired temple over to the king and high priest, it was restored to its ancient strength and splendor, and they earned the respect of their employers as well as their wages.

We need more such workmen in our shops and factories and fields, and we all should strive to do such work, whatever our trade or profession or place may be.

On the other hand, the king and priest paid these faithful workmen honest wages and paid them promptly. There was no occasion for them to strike for higher pay and no complaint about unpaid wages. There were no silver and gold vessels made for the temple out of the money that had been collected until the workmen had been fully paid. The workmen's wages were the first lien upon the money. There was no trouble between capital and labor in connection with this work, for it was transacted with entire honesty and faithfulness on both sides.

Let the same fairness and justice mark our relations between capital and labor and our industrial problem will be solved.

It would appear, however, that after the work was completed and paid for enough money remained to provide vessels of silver and gold for the temple (II Chron. 24:14), and thus the temple was not only repaired but also beautified and restored to its former splendor.

It is right that we should adorn our churches and furnish them with everything that will add to the efficiency and beauty of our worship and work.

LESSON IV.—APRIL 23

UZZIAH'S PRIDE AND PUNISHMENT

The Perils of Prosperity

Golden Text: Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Prov. 16:18.

Devotional Reading: Prov. 16:18–25.

Reference Material: Num. 12:1–15; Deut. 8:11–14; II Kings, 5:20–27; II Chron. 25; Jer. 9:23–24; Dan. 4:28–33; Matt. 23:8–12; James, 4:6; Rev. 3:17–19.

Lesson Text: II Chronicles, 26:3–5, 15–21

3 Sixteen years old *was* Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also *was* Jecoliah of Jerusalem.

4 And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did.

5 And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper.

15 And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong.

16 ¶ But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to *his* destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.

17 And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the LORD, *that were* valiant men:

18 And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, *It appertaineth* not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither *shall it be* for thine honour from the LORD God.

19 Then Uzziah was wroth, and *had* a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar.

20 And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he *was* leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him.

21 And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, *being* a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son *was* over the king's house, judging the people of the land.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***A Prosperous King.***
2. ***Prosperity Leading to Pride.***
3. ***Pride Pushing into a Holy Place.***
4. ***A Fearful Retribution.***
5. ***Enforced Isolation.***

Joash, who began his long reign so promisingly by repairing the temple, lapsed into idolatry, stoned to death Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, for rebuking the apostate people, and was then murdered by his servants in his own bed "for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada."

He was succeeded by his son Amaziah, who punished the murderers of his father, and conquered the Edomites, but made the mistake of bringing home with him Edomite idols. He challenged Jehoash, king of Israel, to combat and met with disastrous defeat at his hands and remained as his vassal. At his death he was succeeded by his son Uzziah.

1. A Prosperous King

The new king started out well, as we so often read in these annals. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," "and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper." He subdued the Philistines on the west and the Ammonites on the east and greatly strengthened his kingdom.

He did this by two general lines of policy. First, he improved the agriculture of his country. He built towers in the wilderness for the protection of farmers, hewed out many cisterns for the preservation of water so precious in that region, and gathered husbandmen and vinedressers; "for he loved husbandry." He thus entered upon the policy of the development and conservation of the natural resources of his country, a policy we are just beginning to appreciate and follow in our country after lavishly exploiting if not wasting its natural treasures in forest and soil and mine.

Agriculture is the primary physical basis of human welfare and national prosperity and strength, and no nation can be strong that does not root itself in the soil.

Then Uzziah developed his military resources. He organized an army of twenty-six hundred "mighty men of valor" and enrolled a militia of over

three hundred thousand. He armed them with the most improved weapons of his day, shields and spears and helmets, coats of mail, bows and stones for slinging, and engines for throwing great stones.

These are all antiquated in our day and appear harmless in comparison with our smokeless rifles and machine guns and 16-inch cannon and huge warships and submarines that prowl around under the sea like terrible sharks and armed airships that scour the heavens like monstrous birds of prey and poisonous gas whose deadly breath kills every living thing.

Yet our modern weapons mark no moral advance over the spears and arrows of Uzziah. They are still only vastly more efficient instruments to kill men and not to save them. And yet we see some signs of the coming of a better day in the ministry of the Red Cross and other humanitarian agencies on the battlefield and also in the budding of a more rational way of settling international questions in the League of Nations.

So Uzziah became famous and "he was marvelously helped, till he was strong."

2. Prosperity Leading to Pride

"But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction." How often history repeats itself at this point! In the days of his pious youth, when his kingdom was harassed on every side, Uzziah did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord; he had a sense of his own weakness and unworthiness and walked humbly with his God.

But when he had beaten back his enemies and developed the agricultural and military resources of his kingdom so that he was grown strong and famous "his heart was lifted up." His piety turned to pride and his humility to self-confidence and boasting. It is hard for our poor human nature to stand prosperity. Many a king has illustrated this frailty and our political and financial and social life affords many striking instances of the same infirmity.

Many a man comes up from humble antecedents and conditions and attains some great station, or possibly only some little brief authority, and then he grows so insufferably overbearing in his pride that his former associates exclaim, "On what meat doth this our Cæsar feed that he is grown so great?"

Sudden wealth puts a similar strain on a man's humility and tends to inflate him with such a sense of his superior power as may make him unbearable in his insolence. But it is not only they who attain to conspicuous success that are subject to this temptation, for the same danger may beset us all.

A very little degree of prosperity and social eminence may cause us to lift up our hearts in self-esteem and pride.

When the heart goes wrong, the life soon follows, and so Uzziah "transgressed." Out of the heart are the issues of life, and when a fountain becomes tainted the stream will soon be contaminated.

As we think, so we do, and pride in the heart will inevitably corrupt the life.

3. Pride Pushing into a Holy Place

The particular wrong which Uzziah did on this occasion was an act of sacrilege. "He transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense." The Holy Place was forbidden to all except the priests, and they only were allowed to offer incense on its altar.

The presumptuous and haughty king pushed into this shrine to perform this priestly act. Apparently his pride was not satisfied with his royal position and prerogatives, but he wanted something more. He was jealous of anyone that could do something he could not do. That Holy Place exercised a strange fascination over him just because he was forbidden to enter it. He was ambitious to gather all power into his own hand, ecclesiastical as well as civil. Possibly he wanted to emulate the Egyptian Pharaoh who held the dual office of supreme pontiff and king.

And so he thought to brush the high priest and all his minions out of his way as with a bold and blasphemous face he strode into the Holy Place. He lifted up his heart, not only against men, but even against the Most High God.

This is the course that pride logically runs in all hearts and lives. Having begun to feed on the meat of ambition and self-aggrandizement it stops not as long as there is anything it wants and does not have.

The politician, having gained one office, begins to scheme for another, even the highest, and the millionaire, having got one

million, immediately begins to plan and plot for two, and then for ten, and then for a hundred millions.

And pride in relation to men inevitably leads to presumption and rebellion against God. It is true that a man's pride may not lead him to mount into the pulpit and presume to officiate in holy things, but it may lead him to push into the church and attempt to control its administration and its minister.

There are many ways in which we can show our disregard of divine appointments and our disposition to take things that do not belong to us into our own hands. We may go into the house of God and profess to worship him with our lips when our hearts are far from him, and while pretending to serve him we may be breaking his commandments and wronging his children.

All our sin, whether in the heart or in the life, transgresses against God. The most secret thought of evil we cherish or the least act of wrongdoing runs up against the throne of God and grieves him.

4. A Fearful Retribution

The horrified priests tried to restrain the sacrilegious king. He did not sin without warning, but against the most urgent admonition. Yet all this only kindled his pride until it burst into hot flames of anger.

But the hectic flush of his temper quickly turned to fearful retribution. Even as he grew red with wrath his forehead broke out in leprosy, and his dreadful doom was upon him. In the very Holy Place which he dared to defile with his unholy presence and pride he was stricken with that awful plague.

Leprosy has ever been recognized as the most literal and fearful symbol of sin.

It subtly lurks in the blood, unsuspected, it may be, for long years, and then it breaks out upon the flesh and begins its slow work of eating its way into the vitals. It is a living death, the most terrible of all the diseases of men.

Yet it is only an outer physical symbol of the inner spiritual death of sin. Pride and anger and avarice and selfishness and sin of every kind and degree are just so much of this poison of death in our souls which is surely working towards its fatal end.

There is only one thing we really need be afraid of in all this world, and that is sin. No matter about the kind and degree: any kind and degree is the fatal seed that, if not rooted out and cured, will grow into all its bitter fruits and final death. We should all earnestly seek penitence and forgiveness and cleansing at the fountain of God's abundant grace.

5. Enforced Isolation

The king was now hurriedly thrust out of the Holy Place and for the rest of his life was quarantined "in a several house." He was not fit to live with other people, his dreadful contagion made him a menace to the community, and so he was forced to live as a social outcast in isolation.

All sin is a disease and an evil contagion that makes the sinner a menace and that may require his physical seclusion, and sin always separates us from one another. Our jails and penitentiaries are such places of enforced isolation, but sin may work social separation scarcely less terrible.

Some years ago the Lieutenant Governor of a Southern State shot an unarmed editor as he passed him on the street. He was acquitted of murder by a Southern jury, but his career was blighted. He belonged to a prominent and influential family in the State, he had political ambitions and prospects, but the mark of blood was upon him and caused him to be shunned by his fellowmen.

He turned from politics and tried to enter the ministry, but the church closed this door against him. One by one his friends withdrew from him, his wife deserted him, he spent the rest of his days avoided by his human kind as though he were smitten with a plague in terrible loneliness, and at last he died attended only by a negro servant who remained faithful to him to the end. His crime isolated him from the community and forced him to live "in a several house."

It is so with all sin, not only with murder, but with pride and selfishness of every kind. Sin is anti-social and drives everyone into his own prison. It separates from God and expels the sinner into the outer darkness.

The only cure for it is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We should flee to him for cleansing and live his life of purity and peace.

LESSON V.—APRIL 30

ISAIAH'S SUMMONS AND RESPONSE

The Service to Which God Calls Us

Golden Text: Here am I; send me. Isaiah, 6:8.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 67:1–7.

Reference Material: Gen. 12:1–4; Ex. 3:1–4:17; Josh. 1:1–9; Ezek. 2:1–7; Matt. 10:5–20; 28:18–19.

Lesson Text: Isaiah, 6:1–8

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.
2 Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.
3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory.
4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.
5 ¶ Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.
6 Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, *which* he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:
7 And he laid *it* upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.
8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here *am* I; send me.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. A Splendid Vision.
2. A Man of Unclean Lips.
3. Unclean Lips Purified.
4. A Call to Service.
5. A Strange Message.
6. A Dark Prospect.

Isaiah was the greatest of the Hebrew prophet-preachers. He lived in Jerusalem and his ministry extended through the reigns of four kings and a period of sixty years. He began in the reign of Uzziah when Judah was en-

joying a high degree of material prosperity. This outward splendor, however, was only thin gilding that concealed inward corruption, and the faithless nation was already staggering towards its fall.

Isaiah saw the falseness and rottenness of prince and priest and people and spared them not. In the first five chapters of his book he holds up the mirror to his time and shows us a terrible reflection.

The last part of the third chapter is a perfect picture of Parisian fashion and frivolity and falsity, and the whole discourse has a modern tone and squarely strikes the sins of to-day. Through these clouds of guilt shoot lightning flashes of wrath and retribution.

In the sixth chapter the prophet gives us his divine call and mission, the heavenly vision which, like that of Paul, transfigured his life and inspired him for heroic service and suffering.

1. A Splendid Vision

Isaiah saw his vision in a temple. That is a good place to see visions. Down in the dust and clamor of the market-place, out in the whirl of society we are not likely to see any ideal that will transfigure life. But in the house of worship messages are heard and aspirations are kindled that lift us far above this world and give life new meaning.

The prophet saw the Lord upon his throne, his rightful place, where he always has been and will be, the central and supreme Ruler of the world. His train filled the temple, the royal robes of his glory flowed from him and filled the place. Seraphim hovered around him, veiling their feet and faces with two pairs of wings to express their reverence and to shield themselves from the intolerable splendor and using a third pair to fly as ministering spirits everywhere at the divine bidding.

> **Man is the top of this world, but not of all worlds: far above him in the unseen are bright spirits that flock close to the throne of God and burn with glory.**

What was the character of this mysterious Person the prophet saw so exalted and splendid? On this everything depends. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." Holy character—that is his true crown and glory; now let him reign; the universe is safe. Infinite wisdom, power and splendor, add these up and they do not make God; add love, and still the sum is incomplete; add justice and purity and truth,

holiness of character, and now we have God. This was the vision the prophet saw that lifted him to a new plane of being and transfigured his life.

Low and poor and barren is the life that has no divine vision to lift it up and idealize it; lofty and strong and rich is the life that has caught such a vision and is carried up on its wings.

2. A Man of Unclean Lips

The prophet was instantly smitten with a sense of sin. "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." He did not go out from that vision filled with pride and vanity because of what he had seen, boasting of his experience, exalting himself over others by his special privilege, but he humbled himself in the dust.

This is the proper effect of superior privilege and power anywhere, but especially in the presence of God. It is an awful thing to see the holy God and Father of us all, and then look with pride and scorn upon our fellowmen.

Why was the prophet seized with a sense of sin? No word of condemnation had been spoken to him, the Lord had not cast upon him an angry glance, not the least allusion had been made to his lips that now seemed clogged with uncleanness. "For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts," was the reason.

The mere vision of Jehovah had made his sense of sin vivid, the splendor of the divine holiness had revealed and intensified the spots and specks of human guilt. In the night all discolorations and defects are concealed: the sun brings them to light and discloses their deformity.

We need only to step into the presence of God and become vividly conscious of the whiteness of his holiness to see how stained and saturated with sin we are. In the presence of Jesus no word of condemnation need be spoken, our own heart condemns us, and we can only cry, "God be merciful to me the sinner."

3. Unclean Lips Purified

How was the prophet's cry of unclean lips received? Did a holy angel smite him down or a flash of the Lord's anger consume him? No, swift as a

beam of light a seraph flew with a burning coal from the altar, and touching the prophet's mouth with it, said, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged."

The prophet's sin was not denied or even palliated: his guilty conscience told him the truth; he was unfit for that holy presence. Yet he was not dealt with as his sin deserved and thrust into outer darkness, but his penitential guilt was forgiven and burned away. Those unclean lips were purged and made vocal with holiness.

The prophet was here so close to God that the intermediary ritual of the temple was done away and the cleansing fire of sacrifice was directly applied to his lips.

> **God is a consuming fire against sin, and yet if we are penitent his fire will burn our sin away and leave us unharmed but purified. All that stay in his presence must be assimilated into the likeness of his holiness, and the blood of Jesus Christ will work this blessed change in us.**

The prophet's lips were the means of his ministry, and there it seemed to him that all his guilt was congested, and therefore they were cleansed.

> **The lips are a true and full expression of the whole nature; there our guilt gathers and finds an outlet, and there it must be cleansed away. Few habits are more vile than foul speech, few sins worse than unclean lips; and no habit is more significant of good character and is a more beautiful accomplishment than pure and choice speech. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in network of silver."**

4. A Call to Service

The prophet now heard a voice calling for volunteers for service. "And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

The Lord calls human beings to go for him and do his work, the Creator needs his creatures, Omnipotence needs the help of finite weakness. The steam must have its cylinder, the river its channel, and the lightning its conducting wire. God has power enough, but he needs conductors. "All

power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations": this is ever the divine logic and method.

God has many tasks waiting to be done, in the field and factory, in business and in the professions, in the home and school and church, in the great work of building his kingdom in the world, and to this service we are called. We are not drafted into servitude, but are called as volunteers into free service.

Immediately after he was pardoned and purified, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord and was given a work to do, and it will not be long after we have experienced pardoning grace that we shall hear the call to service.

One must have his hearing dulled with worldliness and sin that cannot hear this call in this great day of service, but the purified soul hears it clear and strong.

"Here am I; send me," instantly responded the prophet. His vibrant soul answered back quick and clear as a struck bell.

All great souls wear this mark of unquestioning obedience, going out not knowing whither they go. Not until we simply hear the voice of the Lord and commit ourselves to his path shall we find power and patience and peace. We are saved to serve, and only in our service shall we fulfil our mission and reap the full reward of the Christian life.

5. A Strange Message

Following the passage a few verses beyond our lesson we find that the prophet was given a strange message; not a flattering speech that would bring him praise and power, but an unpopular speech that would bring persecution and death. The message was, "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes."

This, of course, was not Isaiah's literal message to the people, as his prophecies show, but rather describes the effect and outcome of his preaching. Light may soften one substance and harden another, and truth that saves a responsive soul, when rejected by a disobedient soul, will dull the ears and blind the eyes and make the last state worse than the first.

This fateful principle lies at the root of some of the most fearful warnings of God's Word, and it is the explanation of this strange message given to the prophet.

God, knowing the blinding, hardening effect of the prophet's ministry, virtually said to him, "Go on with your preaching; tell your message though the people themselves deaden their ears and blind their eyes to it." For the truth must be preached though we know that some men in their willful wickedness turn it to their own destruction.

God will let his light and love shine upon us, though we shut our eyes to it and at length bring upon ourselves total blindness and everlasting night.

6. A Dark Prospect

The prophet shrank back from such a message and instinctively cried, "Lord, how long?" And the answer came, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate."

This was a terrible prospect that was opened before his vision, but he now knew what to expect, the worst was now branded upon his soul. His was to be no easy path of success and applause, but one of darkness and devastation and at its end a cross.

Even so did Jesus see the cross from the beginning of his ministry and ever pressed on towards its outstretched bloody arms.

Unfaithful Judah along with apostate Israel was now marching towards captivity, when the Lord would remove them "far away." Yet beyond this dark end was seen a gleam of light. The tree was to be cut down again and again, but it was a tree "whose stock remaineth," and "the holy seed is the stock thereof." After the ax and the fire "a remnant shall remain," and henceforth this was the great prophet's faith and hope.

God has often cut his unfaithful people down to the ground, but there has always remained a faithful seed that has again sprouted and bloomed.

LESSON VI.—MAY 7

ISAIAH'S IDEAL FOR A WORLD AT STRIFE

Conditions of Permanent Peace

Golden Text: Come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. Isaiah, 2:5.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 46:1–11.

Reference Material: Psalm, 46; Mic. 4:1–5; Matt. 5:9; Gal. 5:22–23; Phil. 4:8–9.

Lesson Text: Isaiah, 2:2–4; 11:1–9

2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

3 And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;

3 And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears:

4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

5 And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

6 The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

7 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.

9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *The Dark Background of the Picture.*
2. *The Coming King.*
3. *A New Page in History.*
4. *Transformed Nature.*
5. *Worldwide Blessing.*

When James Rusell Lowell asserted in the presence of Tennyson that "Wordsworth was no more an artist than Isaiah," Tennyson replied, "I consider Isaiah a very great artist—everything he says is complete and perfect." This passage is one of the loftiest flights of the poet-prophet. He sings a song of a King that will restore his ruined people, the artist dips his brush in the colors of his inspired imagination and paints a glowing picture of coming glory.

The prophet may have had in the foreground a Jewish king that would save his country, but in the distant background stood that mysterious figure of the Messiah who gathered into himself attributes and achievements that were fulfilled only in the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of glory.

1. The Dark Background of the Picture

The picture is set against a dark background, as the rainbow blooms out upon the bosom of the rain-cloud. The prophet saw the Assyrians overwhelming Samaria and drawing nigh to Jerusalem. In graphic language the swarthy host is pictured as marching through the land and at their approach village after village is deserted by the panic-stricken, fleeing inhabitants. "He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Michmash he hath laid up his carriages: they are gone over the passage: they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled."

Only at Nob shall the enemy take a stand where "he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem." There the enemy would be stopped and be cut down by the Lord of hosts as "the thickets of the forest with iron." Yet out of all this destruction "the remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God."

This was ever the hopeful fact about Israel: it was God's people, and however it might prove unfaithful and be cut down to the ground it contained a seed that Jehovah would not let die and that would again sprout and blossom.

2. The Coming King

The new Shoot was to be a king whose character is now described. Everything depends on character, for this is the sap in the vine that is to secrete and crystallize itself in fruit.

How was this coming King to differ from the kings whom Isaiah had seen and in whom he had been bitterly disappointed, in what mental and moral garments would he stand robed? "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him": that is sufficient in itself; the Spirit of the Lord shall descend upon him as the dew of heaven and shall be the fountain whence all the streams of his life shall flow.

The result of this divine endowment is specialized into several aspects. First, "the spirit of wisdom and understanding": he shall have discernment that will pierce through all points and problems and hit the center of every fact and principle; without such discernment the king would miss right ends and means and work confusion.

Next, "the spirit of counsel and might": he shall have the ability to plan and execute, his wisdom is not theoretical and impracticable, but it shapes itself into workable methods and achieves solid results.

Again, "the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord": his knowledge has divine roots and grows out of filial reverence, his human wisdom coincides with the divine will and thus flows in the channel of omnipotence.

Finally, he shall be "of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord," literally "he shall draw his breath in the fear of the Lord": the spirit of reverence and faith and fellowship towards the Lord shall envelop and permeate him like the atmosphere so that he shall breathe it as his life and delight.

All these elements of kingly endowment were realized in their highest perfection in the Lord Jesus to whom the Spirit was given without measure and in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily.

3. A New Page in History

Character expresses itself in conduct, and this aspect of the King is next pictured. What will this new Shoot out of the stock of Jesse do? Will he put forth the same fruits of waste and wickedness, of misrule and oppression that his predecessors did? No, "he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth."

This opens a new page in history. Too often have kings held unequal scales of judgment and exploited the people for their own enrichment; they have favored the rich and strong, who could buy their way to place and power, and have trampled upon the poor and heeded not their piteous cries. But the new King will penetrate to the core of every case and administer righteous judgment; and the poor and the meek shall have fair play and full protection under his just and beneficent sway.

This ideal was strikingly realized in the life of Jesus who rebuked Pharisees and turned away the rich ruler and associated with outcasts and delighted to comfort the meek and lowly; and under his growing reign in the world justice is everywhere mounting to the throne and the poor and meek are receiving their rights.

"And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked": his gentleness and grace to the poor and lowly are not to be interpreted as signs of pliant softness and weakness, for he will not fail to visit upon the wicked their just desert, and his angry breath is a consuming fire.

Jesus was no dreamy sentimentalist, an effeminate creature with a sweet and clinging disposition, but out of the same lips from which fell such gracious words issued terrible lightnings of judgment and wrath to scorch and scorn hypocritical Pharisees and big sinners in high places.

Such righteousness and justice must ever be the basis of permanent personal and national and international peace.

4. Transformed Nature

The result of the King's rule is next traced in the world of nature. A beautiful picture is drawn of the harmonies that shall tune all animals into concord and weave their lives as an accompaniment into the complex music of human life.

The hatred and strife that have for ages turned the animal world into a field of battle and strewn it with mangled creatures and saturated it with blood will be harmonized into mutual faith and fellowship and love; the most ancient enemies, such as the wolf and the lamb, shall dwell together in friendly relations: and animals of the fiercest enmity and strength, such as the leopard and the lion, shall lie down with animals of the most helpless weakness, such as the kid and the calf. The ancient and bloody strife between animals and men, also, shall be turned into mutual trust and friendship. A little child shall play

with a young lion as with a kitten and shall even put out its hand and touch the deadly cobra and receive no harm.

Is this to be taken literally, or simply as a poetic picture? In some degree it may be taken literally. Enmity between the animal and the human worlds is largely the result of human sin.

When found in a state of pure nature where human presence has never intruded its treachery and pain, animals are often found to be utterly devoid of fear and perfectly trustful towards men: it is only after they have been deceived and mistreated, after they have had experience with traps and guns, or been caught and abused, that they fly with fear or turn and fight.

Animal instincts have been largely mixed and vitiated with human passions. Were human presence purified and made harmless and gentle, there is no telling what effect this might have on the animal world. The domesticated dog and cat, cow and horse, may be the forerunners of animals as they will be under universal human kindness, the first opening buds of this prophecy that may one day fill the entire world of life with its bloom. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, and the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God.

Yet we may also take this prophecy figuratively as a poetic picture of redeemed human nature.

Man is still largely under the dominion of his animal body, every man has in him a whole cage of wild beasts all snapping and snarling and biting, and this fills the world with strife.

Under the gentle sway of the King, when all human instincts are brought under control and transfigured into human virtues, when all hearts are filled with the mind of Jesus, the world will cease to be a den of fighting beasts and become a home of loving children.

5. Worldwide Blessing

The picture now broadens out into a universal scene of love and joy. "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

Knowledge is the root of all right action; we never do the right thing until we know what ought to be done and how to do it. Knowledge of the Lord is the highest knowledge that embraces and unifies all other knowledge and leads it up to the highest ends; it is the root of all good, the path that takes us out into a large and wealthy place, even glorious life and liberty.

In so far as we really know the Lord our minds flow in the same channel with his and we live a common life with him: then our life becomes a sunlit stream of strength and joy.

Jesus taught men the knowledge of the Lord in marvelous words of simplicity and beauty, causing this knowledge to shine forth in the fullness and splendor of the sun; and then he sent out his disciples to teach all nations whatsoever they should know and do concerning the Lord.

Under the spread of Christianity this knowledge is growing and widening in the world, overflowing all continents and islands of the sea. We are beginning to see the dawn of the prophecy: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it."

Jewish narrowness and exclusiveness had no contracting grip upon Isaiah's prophetic faith and outlook, but with magnificent clearness and breadth of vision he saw all the peoples of the world flocking to the ensign of the coming King; and we are ever seeing his coming.

I may not stay to see the day
When the great Saviour shall bear sway,
And earth shall glitter in the ray
That cometh from above;
But come it fast or come it slow,
'Twill come at last, I surely know,
And heaven and earth shall feel the glow,
And men shall call it Love.

LESSON VII.—MAY 14

HEZEKIAH LEADS HIS PEOPLE BACK TO GOD

Wise Methods of Reform

Golden Text: The Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him. II Chron. 30:9.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 96:1–10.

Reference Material: II Chron. 29; 32; 34:29–33; Hosea, 14; Amos, 9 :7–15.

Lesson Text: II Chronicles, 30:1–9, 13

And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel.

2 For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month.

3 For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem.

4 And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation.

5 So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done *it* of a long *time in such sort* as it was written.

6 So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria.

7 And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, *who* therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see.

8 Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers *were, but* yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you.

9 For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children *shall find* compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God *is* gracious and merciful, and will not turn away *his* face from you, if ye return unto him.

13 ¶ And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *An Attempt to get Together.*
2. *Better Late Than Never.*
3. *An Ancient Postal Delivery.*
4. *A Scorned Invitation and a Healed People.*

Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah when it was at its lowest point of spiritual degradation. Ahaz, his father, had made molten images of Baal and had burnt his own children in dreadful heathen sacrifice. He rifled the temple of its treasures and finally shut up its doors. The public worship of Jehovah ceased in Jerusalem, and heathen altars were set up in every corner of the city.

Throughout all the cities of the land, also, altars smoked with idolatrous sacrifice. True religion had seemingly perished in Judah, and the God of Israel was forgotten.

It was in these circumstances that Hezekiah began to reign at the age of twenty-five years. He was one of those rare cases, a good son coming after a bad father. His mother's name, Abijah (my father is Jehovah), may contain the explanation of his training and character.

Whenever on the pages of history, whether sacred or profane, we find a good man, we may look in the background for a good mother. "A good mother," says George Herbert, "is worth a hundred schoolmasters."

1. An Attempt to Get Together

Hezekiah began his reign by reviving the worship of Jehovah. A remarkable feature of the movement was that the king "sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come." Judah and Israel had now been separated for more than two hundred years and had just recently been at war, in which Judah had suffered a terrible defeat; yet the new king of Judah included Israel in his invitation and took special measures to secure their attendance.

Hezekiah was a man of broad views. He saw that things were going from bad to worse in both kingdoms and that these separated brethren should be unified in the worship of their common ancestral God. The temple was "the house of the Lord" to them all, and he would signalize the beginning of his reign by a grand recognition of this fact.

The first step that separated brethren should take towards reformation and revival is to get together. Members of the same family or church or nation that are divided through alienation and strife need expect no blessing; the same state of heart that separates them from one another will also separate them from God. Let them come together in unity and peace, and the same spirit that draws them together will draw them to their common Father.

Both Judah and Israel were invited to "come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem."

The house of the Lord is a common mercy-seat where all divided hearts should meet. There all differences should disappear and melt into one mind.

They were "to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel." The passover pointed back to that great deliverance which was the Declaration of Independence of the chosen people, the pole-star of their national life and the mighty proof of God's power and favor.

This appeal touched a deep common chord in their history and consciousness and woke music that had long been silent. Hezekiah tried to hitch his wagon to this splendid star in their history so as to draw the whole nation after it.

When we are divided we should seek to revive tender and powerful common memories and interests that draw and bind us together. The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ is a mighty deliverance that stands back of us; and, as we think of it, all our divisions and strifes should vanish and we should be merged into one mind and heart.

2. Better Late Than Never

The appointed time for the passover was the fourteenth day of the first month, and this day was now past, so that the ordinance could not be observed at the proper time. Why had it not been kept? "Because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem." There was here a dereliction of duty, beginning with the priests and spreading down through the people.

When ordinances are neglected and the church pews are empty and religion is declining, somebody has not sanctified himself;

probably the trouble begins in the pulpit, and the people also are at fault.

It was a ceremonial cleansing that these people had failed to observe, but we need to see to it that our hearts are cleansed from all unrighteousness.

What was done about this failure? Because the proper time was passed, was there no observance of the Passover at all? No, "for the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month." In the eighteenth verse it is also stated that they did "eat the passover otherwise than it was written." The Passover was very strictly defined and rigidly limited in the time and mode of its observance in the book of the law; yet here these requirements were relaxed and the ordinance was observed "otherwise than it was written."

This shows that the Jews far back in the days when they were bound down under such strict ceremonial law knew that the mere letter killeth and that it is the spirit that giveth life. When they could not keep the ordinance according to the letter, they relaxed the letter of the law and fulfilled its spirit.

Ordinances are only means to a spiritual end and must not be allowed to obstruct it. They must be kept plastic so as to bend to their purpose. The mere time and mode of worship are never so vital as the worship itself and may be adapted to circumstances.

Yet this plasticity of ordinances does not give us the liberty of license to modify or dismiss them at our pleasure. They are still divinely appointed and are not to be treated as mere matters of opinion and taste. Their usefulness depends in some degree upon their being regular and rigid in their time and mode, and these should be respected.

These Jews, because "they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written," did not let the Passover lapse altogether, but they repented of their neglect and restored it to its proper place. They let the first month pass, but they seized the second month. Better late than never.

If we have been neglecting any duty, then let us seize the present month and hour and do our whole duty.

3. An Ancient Postal Delivery

The plan pleased the king and all the congregation, and it was now carried into effect. It was decreed that a proclamation should be made throughout all the land from Beer-sheba on the southern boundary to Dan on the northern limit of the two kingdoms, bidding the people to come to the Passover. Couriers were soon hastening in every direction, bearing letters from the king, and we have in this an interesting glimpse into the postal service of the time.

The proclamation is an impassioned argument and appeal addressed to the people. They are called upon to "turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, ancestral names that carried them far back of their unhappy division and strife into the palmy days of their unity and peace.

Having touched this common chord in their hearts, the king then assured them that God "will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria," those dreadful Eastern oppressors that were already deporting the Israelites into terrible captivity.

Next he warns them against the traditional obstinacy of their fathers and urges them to "yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into his sanctuary." Again promising them that they shall be delivered from their captors if they turn unto the Lord, the king concludes with the comforting assurance that "the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him."

The whole appeal is pervaded by a beautiful and winning spirit; and it is along these same lines of truth and mercy and love that God approaches us in Christ and appeals to us to return to him. Such a reasonable and gracious approach to one another on the part of separated friends is the proper basis and method of reconciliation.

When one or the other party to a quarrel displays a spirit of superiority and haughtiness, there is little prospect of settlement and peace; and in carrying out civic and political reform we should strive to avoid a harsh condemnatory spirit and be patient and charitable.

4. A Scorned Invitation and a Healed People

The couriers hurried from city to city delivering the appeal. How were they received? In Israel "they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them." They jeered at the messengers and insulted them. They had no proper ap-

preciation of their own condition and danger. So long had they neglected true worship and followed sensual heathen rites that they were seared and hardened against such an appeal and turned mercy into mockery.

This is the fatality of wrong doing: it reacts upon conscience and deadens it into insensibility in which it is no longer receptive of or sensitive to truth and right and duty. It then laughs at the holiest truth as a lie and turns the very gospel of life into a savor of death. Men thus become wise to do evil, expert and cunning and smart at it, and then they become fools and mock at sin.

The king's appeal met with a better reception in Judah. "Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the Lord." The message that was laughed at and mocked in Israel was received with one heart in Judah. How surely shall they that have "one heart" receive a blessing! This was the great mark of the people on the day of Pentecost, all with one accord in one place.

The people gathered in Jerusalem to observe the feast. They began by a work of repentance and cleansing, removing the idolatrous altars and casting them into the Kidron. The people also were sanctified, and "the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah and healed the people." As a result of such preparation they kept the feast with great gladness, "making confession to the Lord God of their fathers." So great was their joy that they extended the feast beyond the seven appointed days to seven days more.

This is always the outcome of genuine religious revival and cleansing in individuals, in a church and in a community and city and country. Let the Spirit of God be poured out upon a city, and its evils will be cleansed away, its social problems solved, and it will be filled with great joy.

Any other basis and method of reform will be superficial and temporary in its work and effects, but religion goes down to the roots and makes these right with God, and then all the streams and fruits of life will be pure and good.

LESSON VIII.—MAY 21

HILKIAH'S GREAT DISCOVERY

The Authority and Influence of the Bible

Golden Text: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. Psalm, 119:105.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 19:7–14.

Reference Material: Deut. 6:6–9; Josh. 1:8; Col. 3:16; II Tim. 2:15; 3:14–16.

Lesson Text: II Chronicles, 34:14–16, 29–32

14 ¶ And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD *given* by Moses.
15 And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan.
16 And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they do *it*.

29 ¶ Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.
30 And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the LORD.
31 And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book.
32 And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand *to it*. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. A Lost Book Found.
2. The Book Read to the King.
3. The Effect of the Book on the King.
4. The Book Taken to a Woman for Interpretation.
5. The Book Obeyed.

Fifty-seven years have passed since the last lesson, during which period Manasseh reigned fifty-five years, and his son Amon reigned two years when he was slain by his own servants in his house.

Josiah, the good son of the corrupt Amon, came to the throne at the age of eight and reigned thirty-one years. He instituted a thorough-going reform in cleaning out the idolatrous Baal worship and repairing the temple, which had again fallen into neglect and dilapidation.

1. A Lost Book Found

While the work of repairing the temple was in progress, Hilkiah the high priest made a great discovery, an event that marked an epoch in the history of the Jewish people. When the officers in charge brought out the money from the chests in which it was stored in the temple, Hilkiah found the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses, this lost book being Deuteronomy, as is evident from the work of reform that its reading brought about in destroying the outlying places of worship and concentrating worship in one central place as is required by that book.

These Jews, priests and king and people, had lost their Bible! A long history lies behind this statement. For hundreds of years idolatry had been creeping in among the Israelites and crowding out the true worship. During all these degenerate days temple and Bible were more and more neglected. Rolls of parchment on which the law was written were always necessarily scarce, and they grew scarcer as they were less prized.

Finally the last roll had disappeared; even the temple roll was gone, it had been dropped into some chest or tossed in among rubbish, and was utterly forgotten. There stood the temple without any book of the law in it, a church without a Bible!

Is this ancient history only? May not we also lose our Bible? Not altogether, it is true, for the book is now so universal and plentiful in its presence, lying on some table or shelf in every house, that it cannot wholly disappear. Yet we may lose it not less really and fatally.

The Bible that lies unread and dust-covered on the table, or buried in a trunk, is as truly lost as though it had been dropped into some hidden hole and forgotten. And even though it be read in a perfunctory way, yet if it is not obeyed it is still a lost Bible.

The world is full of lost books, and perhaps there are more lost Bibles than of any other kind.

"I have found the book," exclaimed the high priest. While rummaging around in the temple, possibly examining the money-chests, Hilkiah came

across the long-lost, utterly-forgotten, dust-covered parchment, and on unrolling it his astonished eyes began to read the words of the law.

What a startling discovery and precious find was that? With what breathless interest must he have read on and on? It is a great find to discover any good book. When we first begin to see into the depths of Browning or the beauty of Tennyson or the grand world of Shakespeare we have made a find that is more precious than gold: how much richer the discovery when the book is the law of the Lord?

We may find our lost Bible. Get that Bible down off its shelf or up out of the bottom of your trunk and begin to read and ponder it; gaze upon its scenes, study its characters, meditate upon its sayings, practice its precepts, absorb and assimilate its spirit, and what will be the result?

The old Book that you thought dull and dry as the dust that covered it will begin to gleam and burn with light; or you will find it full of sap and sweetness; and it will presently be a new discovery to you and you will exclaim, "I have found the book."

The Bible is in some degree a hidden treasure to every one of us which we should every day find and explore. If all lost Bibles were found and read and obeyed, how the world would blaze with light! "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

2. The Book Read to the King

Shaphan the scribe first took the book and read it himself.

That is the first thing to do with the Bible. No use in our trying to read it or teach it to others unless we have read and digested it ourselves. Saturating our minds and hearts with the spirit of the Bible will prepare us for the touch of fire from the Holy Spirit and then we shall burn and glow and have power with God and men.

Shaphan, having read the book himself, then took it to the king, and, having reported on the matter for which he was sent, made the startling announcement of the discovery of the book and read it to the king. The king needs to have the Bible read to him as well as his humblest subject, for this book is no respecter of persons.

Reading the Bible and teaching it to others is especially the work of parents in the home, teachers in the Sunday school and ministers and missionaries; yet it is by no means confined to them, but is the work and duty of all Christians.

We all like to speak of and commend the books we read and prize to others; and it is with pride that we show our acquaintance with popular and classical authors. How much more should we be ready and eager to read and explain " the book of the law of the Lord " ?

This book goes to the root of human life and will so enrich it as to make it bloom and bear the finest fruits. We do a great service to a friend when we commend to him a good book; and we do him the greatest service when by precept and example we commend to him the Book of Life.

3. The Effect the Book Had on the King

When the king heard the words of the book he was seized with consternation and rent his clothes in Oriental fear and woe. A sense of the impending displeasure of God and of the unfaithfulness of his fathers overwhelmed him. "For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do after all that is written in this book."

He saw at once that such laws could not be violated without bringing upon the offenders grave penalties. We also often suffer because of the unfaithfulness of our fathers, but then we also reap a harvest of blessing from their faithfulness, so that we should not complain.

The Bible contains the laws of life, and, whether we know the book or not, we must live according to its principles or perish. Its essential teachings are not arbitrary rules and regulations that change with climate and class, age and condition, but they are the eternal laws of God's nature and of our life. In keeping of them there is great reward, they are in some degree written upon the universal human heart, and disobedience of them must bring upon us their own retribution.

The king, when he stood in the light of the law of the Lord, was as one stripped naked and was horrified at his own uncleanness and guilt.

How much better are we prepared to stand the same test? Many a man living amongst us in unquestioned respectability, priding

himself on his position and reputation, were he to stand in the light of God's Word and see himself as he is, would cry out in shame and horror.

4. The Book Taken to a Woman for Interpretation

How did the king treat the book? "Go ye, inquire of the Lord for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found." He did not dismiss the scribe and forget the book, but he wanted to know more about it.

Willing to know more, inquiring for light, is always a hopeful state of mind and leads on to larger truth. Many men, having heard the Bible read, straightway go their way and forget what manner of men they are and grow oblivious of its most solemn warnings.

We should feel that we know only a little of the Bible, have only scratched its surface and want to penetrate into the depths and fullness of its riches. A book that is the law of the Lord should excite our intensest interest and stimulate our most thorough study.

To whom did they go? They went to a woman! They went to Huldah the prophetess and consulted her. She was specially illumined of the Lord so that she could interpret the law.

Teachers and ministers and scholars can in some degree explain the Bible for us; they have studied it and can throw upon it the light of language and history. But the Holy Spirit is still the best interpreter of the spiritual wisdom and wealth of God's Word, lighting up its pages and disclosing its beauties and glories. Through fellowship with him and obedience to him we can inquire of the Lord and learn from him the meaning and power and blessedness of his law.

The fact that a woman was called upon to explain the Bible in this ancient time shows that she then had a large place in religious thought and life, even filling the high office of prophetess, speaking in the name of the Lord and declaring his judgments.

Woman's place in the church and kingdom should not be narrowed in our day but rather broadened, and she is coming forward to fill it in increasing measure with her special and peculiar gifts and power.

5. The Book Obeyed

The king assembled the elders and priests and Levites and inhabitants of Jerusalem in the temple and read "all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord." The king and the people then took a pledge "to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments," and "the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers."

Having read the Bible they then obeyed it, translating its commandments into conduct and character, its precepts into practice, their promises into performance, the letter of the law into the life of the spirit.

This is the test of all our Bible reading and study. Truth is in order to goodness, and the truth in the Bible is given us in order that we may plant it as seeds in our minds and hearts and cause it to bear fruit in our lives. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

In vain do we read the Bible if we do not live it. We may study its language and history and customs and memorize and master its teachings and be orthodox in our beliefs and yet be all the worse if we disobey it and thus sin against its light. "The devils also believe and tremble." "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Increasing light only increases our guilt if we do not transmute our light into life as the tree by its subtle chemistry transmutes the golden sunlight into golden fruit.

LESSON IX.—MAY 28

JEREMIAH SPEAKS BOLDLY FOR GOD

When and How Should Wrong Be Rebuked?

Golden Text: Amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God." Jer. 26:13.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 103:13–22.

Reference Material: II Sam. 12:1–14; I Kings, 21:17–24; Jer. 7:1–15; Amos, 6:1–8.

Lesson Text: Jeremiah, 26:8–16

8 ¶ Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded *him* to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die.
9 Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.
10 ¶ When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house unto the house of the LORD, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the LORD'S *house*.
11 Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man *is* worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears.
12 ¶ Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard.
13 Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you.
14 As for me, behold, I *am* in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you.
15 But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.
16 ¶ Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man *is* not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***A People Enraged Against a Prophet.***
2. ***The Prophet's Brave Reply.***
3. ***The Princes Check the Mob.***
4. ***An Appeal to History.***

Jeremiah was the son of a priest and in him the offices of priest and prophet, which had usually been quite distinct, were united.

The call to prophesy came to him in the days of Josiah and his mission continued until after the fall of Jerusalem. He shrank in humility from the call, but the word of Jehovah assured him of a divine message and divine protection to the end. He was a man without family ties, of gloomy temperament and solitary habits, the weeping prophet of his time.

And he lived in a terrible time. Judah had reached the lowest point of degeneracy and was plunging to its ruin. Babylon was thundering at the gates of Jerusalem and the dreadful doom of captivity was impending.

Jeremiah was shut up in the city during the siege, and he was in the hard situation of a prophet who had to seem unpatriotic. He saw that there was no hope of overcoming or escaping from the foe, and that the best thing to do was to surrender to them. This looked like turning traitor to his own people and city and joining with their enemies. We can easily realize the feelings of the princes and people against him.

It takes the highest courage and the loftiest patriotism to tell the truth at such a time. Jeremiah was the one man in that beleaguered city who saw its true advantage and had the bravery to speak out.

The cry of treason is always raised by the demagogue against the truth-teller and reformer. It may take equal courage on our part to speak the truth in the pulpit, or in politics, or in business, or in social life.

The message the prophet had just delivered on this occasion was one of threatened judgment that God would "make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth."

1. A People Enraged Against a Prophet

This message, that should have aroused the priests and people to a sense of their guilt and danger, only stirred them to furious hatred and violence. "The priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die." The holy city was their pride and the temple the very eye of their city. To speak against Jerusalem was treason of the rankest kind, and against the temple was sacrilege. The truth and poignancy of the prophet's words were not considered: only their sharp thrust and sting were resented.

It takes no small amount of sense and grace to stand charges against one's country without animosity, and against one's religion

without hot indignation; such charges touch the heart and fire the blood. Yet the truth should always be heard and is the only thing that will do us permanent good.

Priests and people, however, rose against Jeremiah and threatened him with death. Instead of calmly hearing the message, they proposed to kill the messenger. Instead of putting out the fire, they would silence the fire bell by hanging the man that was ringing it.

This is the way the world has often dealt with its prophets. Socrates, Paul, Luther, Latimer, Knox, Lincoln—long is the roll of those who in one way or another have been made to suffer for truth and duty.

The disposition still lurks in us to strike back at those whose message rebukes us. A man seems to be so completely answered and silenced when his head is off. Many a faithful pastor in the pulpit has suffered in this service, and we should all be careful to receive admonition in a spirit of meekness and not in anger.

2. The Prophet's Brave Reply

Word of the turbulent gathering and threatened violence reached the princes or rulers and judges, and they came up to the temple and sat in judgment in the case. The priests and people preferred their charge against Jeremiah, and he made a noble answer.

He first rolled the responsibility of his message upon the Lord. "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words ye have heard."

When the preacher or reformer knows he has the Lord back of his words he can stand up brave as a lion and face any angry congregation or city or mob.

Then Jeremiah repeated and emphasized his message to the effect that the people should amend their ways and obey the voice of the Lord, who would then withhold the impending judgment. No threats of violence could induce the prophet to abate or modify his message by a word or accent: he stood by it and drove it home upon his hearers with a sharper point in the face of angry opposition.

A coward has no business in the shoes of a prophet or in a pulpit; let only brave men stand there.

Then with beautiful submission the prophet said: "I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you." He was not taking anxious thought even for his own life: that was in the hands of the people—and of God. He was concerned only to do his duty: other people might do as they willed.

A man who has this spirit can never be cowed or conquered. God is for him, who can be against him?

Nevertheless, the prophet warned his enraged opponents of the consequences of their threatened violence. If they took his life they would bring innocent blood upon themselves and their city, and their retribution would never sleep. And he closed his answer by a solemn asseveration that the Lord had sent him to speak to them.

When God speaks through any prophet or teacher we should take care that we give earnest heed to his words. Amending our ways is the only way of escaping the retribution that will fall on all evil doers.

3. The Princes Check the Angry People

The princes of the people were deeply impressed with the sincerity of Jeremiah and the truth of his message and declared: "This man is not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God."

This illustrates the office and value of judges to weigh and counteract the impulses of the people and the violence of a mob. Democracy is a great boon and force in the progress of the world, but it has its dangers and needs proper checks and safeguards. It is likely to be easily stirred by prejudice and passion and swept off into unjust and cruel action. Autocracy may impose a heavy yoke on the people, but mobocracy is the worst of all fates to fall upon men.

And therefore democracy needs to impose upon itself the guard and guidance of wise men who shall sit in review and judgment upon its ways and see that they conform to cool reason and impartial right.

The princes gave such a decision in this case, for no man is worthy of death for speaking the truth, however sharp and bitter it may be. The nation that kills its prophets is cutting off its own head.

Spain thus decapitated its best brains in the Inquisition and thereby re-

duced itself to the impotency that has made it a third-rate power and pitiful spectacle in the modern world. The Bolsheviki in Russia have been pursuing the same foolish and fatal policy in murdering or expatriating its intellectuals and has thus deprived Russia of their ability, putting out its eyes and bringing upon it the doom of a blind giant wildly groping about in the dark.

Rather than persecute its prophets a people should honor the men who speak brave words of rebuke and reformation. Such men are the true friends and guides and progressive forces of a people, who deliver them from evil and uplift them. We do well to honor those who dare to rebuke us faithfully and urge us into the path of truth and obedience.

4. An Appeal to History

Certain elders of the land now rose up and confirmed this decision of the princes. They seem to have remained silent before the threatening of the people, but now they caught the contagion of the courage of the princes and spoke out along the same lines.

They adduced an instance from their own history that taught the same lesson. A prophet in the days of Hezekiah had uttered a dire prophecy against Zion, but did the king and the people put him to death? No, they feared the Lord, and then the Lord repented him of the evil he had pronounced, or he adapted his judgment to the changed conduct of the people. "Thus might we procure great evil against our souls," concluded these elders.

History is a great teacher of truth and morals, because it is the record of the experience of men of like passions with ourselves in like circumstances and temptations, and what happened to them will surely happen to us in like conditions.

We have a long history behind us in all things, law and government, science, literature and art, morals and religion, and this is why we are so far on in civilization and is a great reason why we should keep ourselves from folly and walk in the tried path of wisdom. When we go wrong we "procure great evil against our own souls."

All our wrong doing to others strikes back into our own bosoms. Every sin is a stab at our own hearts, and our souls are secure against every kind of evil, if we will only keep them pure within. If we let no evil thought or feeling find entrance and welcome in our

hearts, the devil can find nothing in us to take hold of, no tinder his torch can kindle, no powder his spark can explode, and all his fiery darts will fall quenched and harmless at our feet.

Still another instance from their history was adduced by the elders, which occurred in the reign of Jehoiakim who caught a faithful prophet and slew him with a sword.

History is full of warnings and impresses its grave lessons on us not once or twice but many times as it shows us the laws of life working in every instance with inexorable certainty. Many nations have gone to the graveyard of history and left mournful monuments to warn us against the fatality of trampling upon the words and warnings of their prophets.

It is encouraging to read that "the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death." So the angry unreasonable mob was checked in its murderous passion, and the brave prophet was saved by the cool reasoning and wise warning of the princes and elders.

The mob spirit is one of the most dangerous and disgraceful aspects of our American life, putting us in a very bad light in comparison with every other nation and bringing upon us the condemnation of the world. We should stand up against it and endeavor to instill into our people such respect for law and for fundamental human right as will check and stop it. No life is safe as long as any life is at the mercy of a mob.

Every true servant of God is in his keeping, however his life may be threatened or even destroyed. Though truth may be on the scaffold and wrong be on the throne, yet "standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own." We should every one speak the truth and do our duty at any cost in the face of any danger, and then God will shelter us in his secret place.

LESSON X.—JUNE 4

JEHOIAKIM TRIES TO DESTROY GOD'S WORD

How to Meet the Forces Antagonistic to God's Word

Golden Text: The word of our God shall stand forever. Isa. 40:8.

Devotional Reading: Isa. 40:1–8.

Reference Material: Isa. 55:8–11; Matt. 5:17–19.

Lesson Text: Jeremiah, 36:4–8, 20–24, 32

4 Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book.
5 And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I *am* shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD:
6 Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD's house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities.
7 It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great *is* the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people.
8 And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the LORD in the LORD's house.

20 ¶ And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king.
21 So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll; and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king.
22 Now the king sat in the winter house in the ninth month: and *there was a fire* on the hearth burning before him.
23 And it came to pass, *that* when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast *it* into the fire that *was* on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that *was* on the hearth.
24 Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, *neither* the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words.

32 ¶ Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *The Bible Read to the King.*
2. *The King Burns the Bible.*
3. *Fatuous Folly.*
4. *Impotent Fire.*
5. *Judgment on the King.*

Jeremiah had been preaching for years against the sins of king and people, and now he was commanded of the Lord to write out his sermons and read them to the people in the hope that they would return from their evil way. Baruch the scribe took down the words of the prophet in a roll of parchment, which is probably the basis of the book of Jeremiah as we have it to-day.

A year later, on the occasion of a great fast day, Baruch took the roll to the temple and read its contents to the assembled people. The reading created a sensation and there was hurrying to and fro between scribes and ministers of state. Report of the roll having been brought to the ministers, they sent for it and read it.

They then took steps to get it before Jehoiakim the king. This was dangerous business and had to be done cautiously. Baruch and Jeremiah were first sent into hiding, and the roll itself was deposited in the private office of one of the scribes, so that it could be quickly obtained in case it was safe to present it before the king.

1. The Bible Read to the King

The ministers now went into the royal presence "and told all the words in the ears of the king." They knew this was a dangerous step and might have concealed the stinging message of the prophet from the king, but they fearlessly did their duty and bearded the lion in his den.

It is not yet always a perfectly pleasant and safe thing to tell the truth to those in authority and power, but it should always be done, and the minister especially, whether civil or ecclesiastical, should not be afraid of the king.

Jehoiakim, having heard of the roll, sent the scribe Jehudi to fetch it, and the scribe brought it and read it in the hearing of the king and of the princes. Jehudi's task has been handed down to many of us.

It is our business as parents, teachers, ministers and servants of Christ, to bring the Word of God to others and read it to them. We may do this, not only in our class teaching and pulpit preaching, but also by making our own lives living epistles known and read of all men.

The king so far seems to be doing well. He is apparently willing to hear the truth and raises a favorable expectation of his future course. A man may seem to listen to truth reverently, but we must see his subsequent conduct before we can discover his real attitude and purpose.

2. The King Burns the Bible

It was December, and the king and his princes and ministers were sitting in the winter apartment of the palace with a charcoal fire glowing in the brazier. Jehudi began to unroll the parchment and read it as it came to view.

The fierce denunciation of the prophet, possibly such passages as we find in Jer. 22:13–19, began to strike upon the dull ears and satiated heart of the king. Instantly his temper began to rise and his face flushed hot with anger. The scribe had unrolled only three or four columns when the irate and passionate king seized a penknife and slashed off the portion that had been read and threw it into the fire.

This process was repeated as the reading proceeded again and again until the entire roll was cut to pieces and burnt up and only white ashes were left to tell the tale of such terrible sacrilege. The guilty king would not tolerate such a Bible. He would make short work with such a book as that. He would meet such denunciations with knife and fire. He would burn such a Bible!

Jehoiakim's knife is still being used against the Bible, and if we look carefully we might be startled to find it in our own hands.

There are various ways in which the Bible may be virtually slashed to pieces and burnt. When our wills rise in rebellion against it and we will not obey it, we reject it as truly and terribly as though we cut it up and threw it into the fire. Or if we do not disown the whole book, but only neglect and disobey certain portions or commandments of it, then we are virtually cutting out those parts and leaving it a mutilated book.

Each one of us has a Bible that has in it only so much of God's Word as we accept and obey, and if we could see our Bible as it

really is, we might see it slashed and riddled on every page with countless verses and whole chapters missing.

Not only the coarse infidel rips his Bible to pieces, but the disobedient believer is in some degree guilty of the same impiety. All forms of irreverence towards the Bible come under the same condemnation. Making fun of the Bible, cracking jokes about it, using its scenes and sayings sacrilegiously, criticising it unfairly and dishonestly, are ways of thrusting a knife into it. There are many mutilated Bibles among us, and many a holy book once reverenced has been burned to ashes in the flames of unbelief and sin.

We ought to restore all the leaves to our Bible and see that it contains every chapter and verse. Always honor the Word of God. Handle the Book respectfully, speak of it reverently. Keep your knife away from it. The very way a boy picks up a Bible will tell us much about his training and character. "O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day."

3. Fatuous Folly

How was this terrible conduct of the king regarded? "Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words."

This shows the hardened sensibilities of the king and his servants, their burned and seared consciences, that they could hear such fiery denunciations and witness such scandalous sacrilege, and yet not be seized with terror and rend their garments in woe.

We witness as sad a sight when we see men mutilating the Bible and mocking it without any sensitiveness and shock of conscience. Even a decent infidel will at least respect the Bible, and open irreverence towards it is a symptom of deep depravity.

Three officers present, let their names be recorded to their honor—Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah—protested against the king's sacrilege. It must have taken some courage to do that, but they dared to speak out against their king.

When the Bible is being insulted and mutilated in our presence, it may be our duty to enter a calm but firm and brave protest against the unholy and outrageous treatment.

"But he would not hear them": the king would not hear, his ears were dulled and stopped with guilt and anger, he kept on burning the book until its last shred was ashes. We should never begin criticising and rejecting the Bible, lest we keep on until the whole book is destroyed.

Then the enraged king commanded his officers to seize Baruch and Jeremiah; he would not only burn the book, but he would also burn the scribe that read it and the prophet that wrote it!

How often men think they can get rid of objectionable books and prophets by cutting and burning them. In their rage and blindness they think they can rip and slash ideas to pieces with a knife and burn immortal spirits; but as well might they think to cut the wind or saber the sunlight to bits with a sword.

"But the Lord hid them." The Lord is always mindful of his prophets. Herod thought he could slay the great Prophet in his infancy by running a sword through every cradle in Bethlehem, but as soon could he have cut the earth in twain or crushed it flat as to have touched a hair of that holy Child.

4. Impotent Fire

Did the book perish from the inspired literature of the world, was that Bible destroyed? No. "Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned."

So the roll was again written and restored to the world's inspired literature. Jeremiah's page in the Bible is not blank, but blazes before our eyes with the prophecies he wrote in that ancient time. Jehoiakim's sharp knife and glowing brazier were impotent even against that parchment.

No amount of slashing and burning has ever been able to destroy the Bible. The Book has been piled up in great heaps and set on fire, but we still have it in undiminished and ever increasing abundance. It has been taken away from the people and hidden, but has always come back and blazoned its presence in the most public places. Higher criticism has dissected it and put it through the fiercest fires of investigation, but we still have a whole Bible. Infidelity has attacked it with every possible kind of knife and fire, but it has kept on multiplying and filling the world.

There is something in this Book a knife will not cut and fire will not burn. It is full of inspired truth and therefore it is imperishable. Heaven and earth shall pass away, the whole web of the sky, burdened with its weight of stars, shall be burned to ashes, but not one jot or tittle of this law shall fail.

The truth in this Book shall pass through all the fires of the world unscathed, because it contains the most splendid thoughts and the warmest and widest love of God. "The law of the Lord is perfect, enduring for ever."

5. Judgment on the King

Jeremiah was not only commanded to rewrite the roll, but he was also given a new and more terrible message to the king. "He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to heat, and in the night to the frost."

So shall perish in their wickedness all those that try to cut and burn the law of the Lord. The words written in this Book are not mere arbitrary regulations or priestly inventions and fictions, cunningly devised to catch men in their net or to scare them as religious ghosts, but they are the eternal laws of life, issuing from the character of God, built into the foundations of the universe, and the necessary condition of social and spiritual life in this world and in all worlds.

If we really could cut and burn them we would throw the world into confusion and ruin; the human soul would fall pierced and slain by its own sword. In keeping of them there is great reward, because they safeguard and protect, promote and enlarge and enrich life itself. They harmonize us into unity with God, and then his beatific life streams through us as music through a flute.

All the friction and fret of sin are eliminated from our life, and we slip into unison with God so that our life and his make one music. This is life eternal to know God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. But "the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

LESSON XI.—JUNE 11

JEREMIAH CAST INTO PRISON

Lessons from Jeremiah's Character

Golden Text: Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Jer. 1:8.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 40:1–8.

Reference Material: Gen. 39:19–23; Jer. 20:1–18; Luke, 3:18–20; Acts, 12:1–11; 16:19–34; 24:22–27; Rev. 1:9.

Lesson Text: Jeremiah, 38:4–13

4 Therefore the princes said unto the king, We beseech thee, let this man be put to death: for thus he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt.

5 Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he *is* in your hand: for the king *is* not *he that* can do *any* thing against you.

6 Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that *was* in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon *there was* no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire.

7 ¶ Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin;

8 Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying,

9 My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for *there is* no more bread in the city.

10 Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die.

11 So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah.

12 And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now *these* old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so.

13 So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***The Prophet Charged with Treason.***
2. ***The Prophet Cast into a Pit.***
3. ***The Prophet Rescued by a Negro.***
4. ***The Melancholy Prophet.***

We are now witnessing the last days of Judah as it perishes in its own wickedness. The terrible people of the farther East that had already blotted out Israel were now closing in around Jerusalem. Successive waves of invaders carried its people off into captivity in Babylon.

The first captivity occurred under Jehoiakim, and Daniel was among these captives. The evil reign of Jehoiakim was succeeded by the short reign of only three months of his son Jehoiachin. Nebuchadnezzar came up against him and carried him to Babylon, where he remained a prisoner for thirty-seven years. Upon the vassal throne of Judah Nebuchadnezzar placed Zedekiah, a half-brother of Jehoiakim, as the last king of Judah, and he only "a shadow king over a desperate band of men."

It was only the dregs of the people that the Chaldeans left behind in Jerusalem, and they soon showed their weakness and wickedness and folly. They again looked towards Egypt for help against their conquerors, and then the Chaldean army swarmed up around the city for its final destruction. It was a fearful time. The besiegers shut the city in, and then famine reduced the inhabitants to dreadful extremities in which mothers were driven to eat their own children and rich women dressed in magnificent robes wandered around searching for scraps of food in heaps of refuse (Lam. 4:5–10).

Jeremiah was caught in the coils of this siege and saw and suffered all its horrors. His lot was cast in this evil time when his conscience enlightened and urged by the Spirit of the Lord compelled him to prophesy against it and this brought upon him great hardship and persecution. His exclamation, "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!" (15:10), recalls Hamlet's plaint, "The time is out of joint; O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!"

1. The Prophet Charged with Treason

Jeremiah prophesied, and certain petty princes or officers of the king, Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jucal and Pashur, heard him and reported his words to Zedekiah. Jeremiah's message to the people was: "He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live; for he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live. Thus saith the Lord, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon's army, which shall take it."

This sounded like treason, and the prophet, while passing out of the gate of the city that he might go into the territory of Benjamin, had been arrested and charged with trying to escape to the enemy. The princes therefore demanded

of the king that the prophet be put to death: "for thus," they said, "he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words unto them: for this man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt."

The case looked bad for the prophet, and yet he was entirely innocent of treason and was simply telling the truth as to what was going to happen and what was the best thing to do in the situation.

In time of war it is necessary that the people combine with unanimity against the enemy, and the man that incurs the suspicion of sympathizing with the enemy and lending them encouragement and aid brings upon himself the instant and fierce indignation of his fellow citizens. Yet the truth should be faced and told at all times, even when it involves national humiliation.

Germany carried on her ruthless methods of war in the face of solemn warnings from some of her own statesmen, and Russia to-day is plunging on into ruin against the prophecies of her own intellectuals and true leaders.

It takes the highest courage and the truest patriotism to tell the truth in such a time. The pew and the people may subtly say to the pulpit, Prophecy smooth things to us, when the truth that ought to be told is rough and sharp.

It was not true of Jeremiah that "this man seeketh not the welfare of this city, but the hurt." He was the one man in that city that saw its true welfare and had the courage to speak out.

This is the cry that the demagogue always raises against the truth-teller and reformer, but it is false. The truth-teller is the man that leads the people into better ways and does not hurt them.

2. The Prophet Cast into a Pit

Zedekiah answered these petty princes, "Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you." There speaks the weak and pliant and cowardly man that Zedekiah was. He had no mind and conscience and spinal column of his own, but simply did the bidding of his courtiers, or "the ring," as we would say. He was a politician of the worst type and was putty in the hands of his bosses.

"Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that was in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so

Jeremiah sank in the mire." He was evidently let down into a cistern in the jail yard, deep and containing mud at the bottom in which he sank.

It was a cruel and awful fate for the prophet, and some have thought that the sixty-ninth Psalm was written by him as an expression of his experience at this time. It certainly voices it in vivid words:

> Save me, O God;
> For the waters are come in unto my soul.
> I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing:
> I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.
> Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink.
> Let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.
> For the Lord heareth the poor,
> And despiseth not his prisoners.

Jeremiah was not the last prophet that has been cast into a deep and miry pit. But out of every such pit prayer can rise to God, and he will hear and deliver.

3. The Prophet Rescued by a Negro

Jeremiah's prayer was heard, and, as usual, it was answered through human means. Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian or Negro, was a slave in the king's house, and when he heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon, he made bold to speak to the king about it.

The black man came right to the point and dared to say, "These men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet," and told the king that the prophet would die if he were left there. The king, over whom the black slave had a strong influence, as has often been the case with slaves, acceded to Ebed-melech's plea and told him to take thirty men with him and get Jeremiah out of the pit. So a Negro saved this ancient prophet of God!

And has not the African often proved a faithful servant and even a saviour to this day? Was he not true to his white master's family in our Civil War? Has he not red blood in his veins that makes him brother to all men and does not his heart contain the milk of human kindness? How often have the black man's hands saved his white brother, and his kindness relieved his suffering?

Then why this prejudice and persecution and outlawry that are so often visited upon him? Give the black man a chance and give him brotherhood.

And it is interesting to notice a thoughtful device of the Ethiopian for the comfort of the prophet. He gathered up some old clothes or rags and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the deep dungeon and told him to put the rags under his armpits so that the cords would not cut him when he was drawn out.

It was a fine bit of forethought and tender care, such as a mother might exercise for her child, and it suggests a fine lesson.

We must not only render service, but we should endeavor to do it in the most tactful and tender way.

Many a man would have dropped the rope to the man in the pit and drawn him out with the cords cutting deep into his flesh, but only a man with a heart as tender as a woman's would have thought of the rags and clouts.

This Ethiopian slave adorned his service with grace that made it beautiful, and we should study to turn our service into a fine art.

4. The Melancholy Prophet

Jeremiah is the most melancholy man in the gallery of Bible characters. We find him in tears, wringing his hands and crying, "Woe is me." Other prophets suffer, Moses and Elijah and Job, but their sufferings are incidental and hope and joy are the prevailing notes of their lives. We always find Jeremiah in the deeps with all God's waves and billows sweeping over him.

Yet the cause of his sorrow was not any peculiar sense of personal sin, for he was singularly pure and upright even among the prophets. Nor was he weeping over the penalties that fell upon his people because of their sins. On the contrary he accepted and even welcomed these as necessary and just. When the Babylonians were thundering at the gates of Jerusalem he recognized them as the servants of God fulfilling his will and he advised surrender as the just and best thing to do.

Neither did Jeremiah complain at his own hard lot in these distressful times. He was no slacker and no whiner, whimpering and crying over his trials and seeking escape into some easier life. He accepted the situation with stoic endurance and suffered to the bitter end without a personal complaint. His sorrow was because of the sin of his people.

His burden was that he had to declare to Judah in the name of the Lord, "Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? I have spoken unto them, but

they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered" (35:13, 17). It was because he had to prophesy to a rebellious people who were plunging down the swift road to ruin that his eyes were ever wet with his tears and his heart was broken.

Yet he faithfully and fearlessly uttered the words of the Lord against priest and princes and king and people and went to jail in consequence. Jeremiah paid the price of doing his duty in a hard situation where the price was unpopularity and imprisonment, and he stands prominent in the long line of prophets, apostles, missionaries and martyrs who suffered all things even unto death that they might be true to their consciences and their God. The supreme example of such sacrifice was the Lord Jesus who fearlessly went the way of the cross that he might save the world.

No such heavy trial may be laid on us, and yet we also are called upon to take up our cross and follow in this same line of service and sacrifice and to pay any price that may be exacted of us.

Jeremiah was carried down to Egypt (43:7) and there disappears from our view, and we hear of him no more and know not his final fate.

LESSON XII.—JUNE 18

THE DOWNFALL OF JUDAH

Results of National Disobedience to God

Golden Text: Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Gal. 6:7.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 137:1–6.

Reference Material: Deut. 28: 15–19, 25, 36, 37; II Chron. 36:11–23; Jonah, 1:1–2; Luke, 19:41–44.

Lesson Text: II Kings, 25:1–12

And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth *day* of the month, *that* Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he, and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.

2 And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah.

3 And on the ninth *day* of the *fourth* month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.

4 ¶ And the city was broken up, and all the men of war *fled* by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which *is* by the king's garden: (now the Chaldees *were* against the city round about:) and *the king* went the way toward the plain.

5 And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho: and all his army were scattered from him.

6 So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.

7 And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

8 ¶ And in the fifth month, on the seventh *day* of the month, which *is* the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem:

9 And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great *man's* house burnt he with fire.

10 And all the army of the Chaldees, that *were with* the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about.

11 Now the rest of the people that were left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carry away.

12 But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land *to be* vine dressers and husbandmen.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *Zedekiah the Puppet King.*
2. *Human Rebellion and Divine Wrath.*
3. *Babylonians at the Gate.*
4. *The Breach in the Walls.*
5. *Captivity and Night.*

We have arrived at the catastrophe which we have long been approaching. The fall of a capital which carries down with it an empire is a world event. The fall of Rome shattered the world for a thousand years, and the fall of Constantinople in the fifteenth century again shook Europe and entered into its events for half a millennium.

Hardly yet have the echoes died away from the stupendous overthrow of empires and cities that was the greatest world convulsion of history in which five historic empires and many cities came crashing down in one vast heap of ruin. Constantinople and Jerusalem were also involved in the Great War, and these historic centers of Christianity again came under Christian control and Jerusalem fell directly into Christian hands.

The destruction of Jerusalem under its last king Zedekiah was one of the most awful and pitiful of national tragedies, not only in the agony of suffering that attended it, but also in the eclipse of religious hopes. Yet the city was burned that out of its ashes might arise a new and better Jerusalem which should receive the Messiah and prepare the way for the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God on earth.

In this lesson we witness the last spark of its glory expire in darkness. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah—these are the short swift steps from the great and good Josiah down into a Babylonian jail.

1. Zedekiah the Puppet King

Zedekiah is the vanishing point in this diminishing series. He was the son of Josiah, the full brother of Jehoahaz, the half-brother of Jehoiakim, and the uncle of Jehoiachin.

It is strange that a chain of such weak links was suspended from so strong a support, but heredity often works in the dark and produces some unexpected and unexplainable results. Perhaps the mother was the source of weakness in this line of degeneration, and yet it is rarely safe to blame the mother.

The times were against these men; they were floating on a flood of corrup-

tion that was heading toward its Niagara—what could they do? Zedekiah is to be pitied for his weakness more than he is to be blamed for his wickedness. Nevertheless the fatal record stands written against him: "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (24:19): the same monotonous record that has occurred in this history with wearisome repetition.

The power of evil to project itself down upon sons and successors is one of the fatal threads in the complicated web of existence; but then the good has the same power and in a still higher degree, so that the account is not one-sided and is at least balanced. It was no excuse, however, for Zedekiah to quote his predecessors or his mother in justification of his course, for he himself "did evil in the sight of the Lord."

Heredity gives a man a tendency or push in the direction of good or evil, but he need not and does not go either way until he chooses his own path. No one ever sins until he consents, and in the consent lies the sin.

2. Human Rebellion and Divine Wrath

It also stands written against Zedekiah that he rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar (II Chron. 36:13). This marks the blindness and folly of Zedekiah's course. The king of Babylon had carried off Jehoiachin and put Zedekiah in his place, and yet the puppet king presently presumed to rebel against his mighty master and thereby sealed his doom.

We do not need to go so far back to find such exhibitions of the blindness and insanity of sin. Sin still breeds conceit and vanity and rashness and leads many a man to make a fool of himself. Imagining himself free and strong and clever, the evil doer plunges into some reckless course of conduct and hopelessly enmeshes himself in the net of his own folly.

After rebellion the next word we look for in the record is wrath, and, sure enough, here it is: "The wrath of the Lord arose against his people" (II Chron. 36:16). Divine wrath follows human rebellion as an explosion follows ignited powder, as lightning follows the electric overloading of a cloud.

The Lord is not an impassive spectator of human evil, but he sits in judgment over it and expresses his judgment in condemnation and fiery bolts. The Lord restrained his wrath and let things go to such a length in Jerusalem that he cast Judah into the pit of Babylonian captivity. That is a seemingly

peculiar way for divine judgment to work and yet it is one of the most fearful things that judgment can do.

The worst thing a bad man can ask for himself is to be let alone: no lightning bolt of judgment then need fall from heaven: he will do the work of judgment and wreak vengeance on himself. Sin is separation, and to be cast out from the presence of the Lord is the final end and deepest judgment of sin.

3. Babylonians at the Gate

Zedekiah's rebellion started the march of the terrible Babylonian hosts westward across the hot plains, and in the tenth month of the ninth year of his reign they arrived at Jerusalem and shut it up in a state of siege.

Then began a scene of horror such as is rarely if ever witnessed in our modern warfare. A cordon of camps was pitched around the city and every avenue of escape was tightly closed. Forts were built around it, probably movable towers provided with battering rams that could be pushed close up to the walls, so as to scale them or beat them down.

Inside the beleaguered city was a state of famine and starvation and death that passes the power of the pen to describe or of the heart to pity. The people became shadows and skinny skeletons that fought like wild beasts for crumbs of bread. The wealthiest citizens and delicately-reared and richly-dressed ladies searched dunghills for scraps of food. Riots made the streets slippery with blood. Mothers killed and ate their own children. The last human instinct perished and only beasts were left.

This awful siege drew from Jeremiah the heart-breaking sighs and sobs of his Lamentations, the "In Memoriam" of the Bible, the most woeful funeral dirge in the literature of the world. "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!" "Their visage is blacker than coal; they are not known in the streets; their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick. They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger. The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children."

Jeremiah passed through this siege and writes as an eye-witness and personal sufferer.

Sin does some terrible work. It can take a great city and turn it into a fermenting, festering, fighting mass of corruption and violence and cruelty and death, a plague-spot of horrors, a fiery splotch

of hell; and what it can do with a multitudinous city, it can also do with a single soul.

4. The Breach in the Walls

Day after day and month after month for a year and a half the Babylonians held the wretched, starving, dying city in their grasp, ever tightening their grip and squeezing the life out of its gasping body. Their battering rams ever kept up their pounding against the walls and gates and every day the final awful doom drew nearer.

At last a breach was made through a gate or wall, and the iron-faced, stony hearted host that had so long been the terror of the Jews poured into their holy and beautiful city. Jerusalem's repeated rebellion had now marked it for total destruction.

Soon after its fall Nebuchadnezzar sent a captain to carry out this work. The city was set on fire and presently it was a mass of flames. Temple and palace and humble home were enwrapped in one common conflagration and were soon ashes. The walls were broken down, and only a great smoking ash-heap was left to crown the holy hill of Zion, while all the treasures of brass and gold were carried off to Babylon.

This was the end of the city that sat there on that height of privilege and power so defiant and scornful in its idolatry and guilt.

Judgment sometimes seems a long time in coming, but at last it does arrive and set things right. Many are the nations and cities that have traveled the same road and came to the same end.

Any nation that lifts itself up in pride and threatens and scorns other nations and tramples upon the laws of civilization is heading towards a terrible downfall, as the latest page of history proclaims in trumpet tones. It is written across all the past with its graveyard full of mournful monuments that the nation that forgets God shall perish.

The same judgment is written against our personal sins, and it is equally certain that the soul that sinneth shall die. Fools mock at sin, but a day is coming when it will register its retribution in flames of fire and will leave only ashes to tell the story of their guilt and folly.

5. Captivity and Night

As the Babylonians poured into the city, probably through the northern gate, the Jews escaped, probably through a southern gate, and made for the

Jordan valley, rushing pell-mell down the steep defiles into the plain below.

The Babylonians, however, were not in the habit of letting their enemies escape. They had come there to stamp out that Judean plague-spot, verily Jehovah himself had sent them there on that mission, and they should not fail. Zedekiah was quickly captured down by Jericho, and he and his sons and his princes were taken up to Riblah, north of Damascus, where Nebuchadnezzar had his headquarters, while his generals were simultaneously besieging Jerusalem and Tyre.

The miserable puppet that had so foolishly rebelled against his maker and master was now brought into the presence of the mighty monarch. There was no mercy in those days for such treacherous subjects. Cruelties were cunningly devised and refined to prolong and intensify the agony.

First, Nebuchadnezzar took Zedekiah's sons and slew them before their father's eyes; then he slew his princes. This was simply preparatory. Then the conquered king was forced to kneel before his master, and Nebuchadnezzar, taking a spear, jabbed it first into one and then into the other eye of Zedekiah and forevermore blotted out his vision and left two bloody holes. Finally, the unhappy king was bound in chains and carried to Babylon, where he lingered in prison until death brought release.

We may be thankful that we live in a more humane age and a happier land. And yet sin is no kinder now than it was then, and we deceive ourselves if we think it is. It still jabs out eyes, the very eyes of the soul, and binds the soul with chains, and its wages still is death.

LESSON XIII.– JUNE 25

REVIEW: THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM'S DECLINE AND FALL

Judah's Prosperity and Adversity

Golden Text: Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. Psalm, 33:12.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 65:1–2, 8–13.

PLAN OF REVIEW

Introduction.
1. Two Good Kings.
2. A Wicked King.
3. The Prophet Isaiah.
4. Hezekiah's Reform.
5. The Law of the Lord.
6. Jeremiah and the Downfall of Judah.

The lessons of the quarter extend from the disruption of the monarchy under Rehoboam in B. C. 937 to the downfall of Judah under Zedekiah in B. C. 586, during which period of three hundred and fifty-one years twenty kings sat on the throne of Judah.

1. Two Good Kings

Rehoboam, whose weakness and wickedness disrupted the monarchy, was succeeded by his son Abijam, who walked in the evil ways of his father and reigned only three years in Jerusalem, and then Judah was blessed with two good kings whose names stand out like stars on the pages of this history.

Asa, son of Abijam, started off well by doing "that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God," a principle that lies at the foundation of all prosperity whether in private or in public life. Asa found much evil that had to be cleared out of the way in the form of the altars and images and groves of strange gods, and he laid the axe at the root of these evil growths. His own mother had also maintained an idol of her own and this went the way of the others as it was cut down and cast into the Kidron.

Having cleared the ground of evil Asa next "commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and to do the law of the commandment," and

thereby woke long-silent ancestral memories and music in their hearts. He then set about the work of rebuilding the broken-down cities and protected them against invasion.

No sooner had he accomplished this defensive work than a swarm of invaders came up out of Egypt against him, but he won a great victory over them down in the valley of Zephathah.

Faith in God is a mighty defense in war as in peace, and time and again has it given the victory.

Asa was succeeded by his son Jehosphaphat, a good king, and he by Joram whose wicked Phenician wife led him astray, and Joram was succeeded by his son Ahaziah, who after a reign of one year was slain together with all his seed by Jehu, successor of Ahab and king of Israel, who was making a clean sweep of all Baal worshipers.

One child of the king, however, Joash, was secreted in the temple until he was placed on the throne at the age of seven years. Joash in his long reign of forty years proved to be one of the good and great kings of Judah. At his coronation the testimony of the law of the Lord was put in his hands as the constitution he was to obey and he followed its requirements.

He signalized his reign by his restoration of the temple, which had fallen into sad disrepair, collecting the money by his novel device of a money-chest with a hole in its lid through which the Jews dropped their shekels, and hiring workmen that did good work and were fairly paid, and thus the worship of Jehovah again enlisted the devotion and was the strength and hope of Judah.

2. A Wicked King

Joash was succeeded by his son Amaziah, who foolishly challenged the king of Israel to combat and went down in defeat, and he was succeeded by his son Uzziah, who made a bad record. He started out well and "God made him to prosper," and he was able to strengthen his kingdom east and west.

He also entered upon a policy of developing the agricultural life and productivity of his country and was a pioneer in the policy of the conservation of natural resources. Yet prosperity brought forth its frequent fatal fruit of pride and "his heart was lifted up to his destruction."

History is full of such instances, and that "pride goeth before destruction" is a proverb that receives repeated and sure confirmation. A little measure of prosperity and social eminence may be

attended with the same danger, and every one needs to take heed at this point lest he fall.

Uzziah grew presumptuous and sacrilegious in his pride and strode into the temple and proposed to burn incense on the altar, an office reserved to the priest and a scandalous act in a layman.

Pride may push us into the church and lead us to seek office and authority to which we are not called. Any one who by means of his wealth and social or political position and influence endeavors to control affairs in the church and dominate the minister, is guilty of grave presumption.

A fearful retribution fell on the proud king, leprosy broke out upon him, and he was quarantined in enforced isolation for the rest of his life.

All sin is unsocial and separates men from one another and from God.

3. The Prophet Isaiah

The greatest prophet of the Old Testament steps upon the scene at this point. He lived in Jerusalem in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah when the outlook in Judah was darkening and the Babylonian oppressors were beginning to loom up on the east.

He saw a splendid vision of Jehovah in the temple which caused him to cry out with a sense of his unclean lips, for the clearer and whiter is the vision of God's holiness the darker is the shadow of our own guilt. A coal of fire touched to his lips by a seraph symbolized the cleansing that prepared him for his call to service. He heard a voice, "Whom shall I send?" and instantly responded, "Here am I; send me."

God still needs messengers and is ever calling upon us to go on his errands of service and equally are we called and saved to serve and only as we go shall we find our mission and full reward.

Yet it was a strange message that Isaiah received, for the prophet and preacher and teacher are not always sent to prophecy smooth things and must often utter sharp words. The prophet was shown a dark prospect of wasted cities and a desolate land, and there are times when we look out over a devastated world, even such a disjointed and ruined world as we now see.

Yet a remnant remained faithful as the seed of a better time, and there is always hope in the most desperate situation and ever "through the shadow of the globe sweeps the earth into the younger day."

Against the dark background of Isaiah's world he saw a vision of a coming King on whom the Spirit of the Lord should rest as his divine endowment, and this King would open a new page of history by judging the poor with righteousness and the meek with equity.

This ideal was strikingly realized in the life and teaching of Jesus and it is now increasingly pervading our civic legislation and social order and will yet be the basis of permanent personal and national and international peace and prosperity. Nature itself will be in some degree transformed under the reign of the Messiah, and worldwide blessing will finally be realized when "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

4. Hezekiah's Reform

Hezekiah is another great and good king who shines as a star of the first magnitude in this history. He was the rare instance of a good son coming after a bad father, following his father on the throne when Judah was sinking to the lowest point of spiritual degradation. The public worship of Jehovah had ceased in Jerusalem and heathen altars were brazenly standing in every quarter of the city.

Like Joash a hundred and twenty-one years before him, Hezekiah set about reviving the worship of the Lord in the temple. To this end he endeavored to reunite the divided kingdoms by sending out invitations to the northern as well as to the southern tribes, and thus made an early attempt at church union.

The attempt was not successful, but it was a splendid ideal and it is one that should yet shine in our sky and lure us on to the time when we can sing, more truly than we can now, "We are not divided, all one body we."

The regular time for the Passover had gone by, but its observance was arranged for the next month, and we are given an interesting glimpse into the postal service of the time in the hurrying of couriers out over the whole country from the north to the south carrying the invitations.

The king's appeal was received with jeers of laughter and scorn in the northern kingdom, for they were not ready for either political or religious reunion and remained separate until they disappeared in captivity.

Every gracious invitation may be rejected, and we may turn the very savor of life in the gospel into a savor of death.

The invitation met with a better reception in Judah where "the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king." One heart was the secret of the day of Pentecost, and God can always pour out a larger measure of blessing of every kind upon his people when they are united in heart and service. As the result of this work of reform "the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah and healed the people."

Any other basis and method of reform than religious revival and faithfulness is shallow and temporary, but such reform goes to the roots of life and bears all good fruits.

5. The Law of the Lord

The law of the Lord plays an important part in this history. Hilkiah's discovery of the lost book of the law, which was evidently our Book of Deuteronomy, was a sensational event in Judah. Through neglect the rolls of parchment on which this book was written had disappeared until all were gone and the very memory of the book was forgotten.

There are more ways than one of losing the Bible and we may lose ours.

On its discovery the book was read to the king, and he was alarmed at its violated commandments and ordered that it be interpreted, and for this purpose it was taken to a woman, Huldah the prophetess, who was illumined of the Lord to divine its meaning. The book was then read to the people and a public pledge was exacted from them "to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments."

It is well to read the Bible, but it is vain to read it unless we translate its commandments into conduct and character.

A very different use of the Bible is encountered in the case of Jehoiakim who when the Scripture was read to him snipped off with a knife each portion as it

was read and threw it into the fire until the whole roll was cut to pieces and burned to ashes.

This sacrilegious king was not the last man to become offended at the Bible and try to destroy it. But the book is indestructible, however often it may be cut to pieces and thrown into the fire, for it is the word of the Lord that standeth forever.

6. Jeremiah and the Downfall of Judah

The downfall and destruction of a kingdom is one of the greatest tragedies that history records, and in the last lessons of the quarter we witness the expiring agonies of Judah.

Jeremiah was the mournful prophet of this time, and he had much to weep over, in his Lamentations pouring out his tears in a flood. He lifted his voice fearlessly against the evils of his time, warning the king and people of the coming captivity and urging them to surrender to the Babylonians who were thundering at their gates. But this put him, where many a faithful prophet has gone, in jail.

Zedekiah has the unenviable notoriety of being the last king of Judah, a mere puppet whom Nebuchadnezzar put on the throne to do his will. The weak king fatuously rebelled against his master, and then the terrible Babylonians were soon pounding against his walls.

The direst famine reduced the city to the most dreadful extremity, and then a breach was made in the wall and the iron-faced, stony-hearted enemy poured through and slaughtered the inhabitants, sent the miserable Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar to have his eyes jabbed out and be carried loaded with chains to his final prison on the far Euphrates. The conquerors returned and burnt the city, temple and palace and home, to ashes, and Judah's star, along with that of Israel, went down in night.

The nation that forgets God shall perish.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD QUARTER

The Third Quarter takes us down into the captivity of the Jews after the stars of the northern and the southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah had set in Babylonian night.

This period extends from the fall of Jerusalem in B. C. 586 to the return of the exiles to their own city under Zerubbabel in B. C. 536, the arrival of Ezra in the same city in B. C. 458, and of Nehemiah in B. C. 445. Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, was probably contemporary with these reformers.

In the early lessons of the quarter we are given glimpses of the dreams and doings of the exiles in the visions of Ezekiel and the exploits of Daniel, and then the lessons take up the story of the various expeditions of the exiles in their return to Jerusalem and of the slow progress and various discouragements in the rebuilding of that city.

The exile was a bitter experience in the history of the Jews, but it was a necessary and good discipline for them in their preparation for their wider mission in the world. By this captivity the chosen people were thoroughly cured of their idolatrous tendencies and practices; their vision of the world was widened and they were prepared for their dispersion when they were to scatter divine truth everywhere; they were strengthened in their faith in Jehovah so that they stood henceforth steadfast in their loyalty to him; they were healed of their internal divisions and bound together in a racial unity that has endured to this day; they were disciplined into purer and more spiritual religious ideals and life; and they were prepared for receiving the true Servant of Jehovah and giving the Messiah to the world.

While the Jews were down in the shadows and bitterness of this captivity, Greece was rising to the zenith of its glory. It was the age of Pericles and Phidias and the Parthenon, of Socrates and Plato in Athens, and mighty Rome was beginning to rise above the horizon.

In closing for the present our study of the Hebrew people we are anew impressed with the interest and value of their history because it sent down to us a rich freightage of blessing. We have derived from Rome a grand heritage of law and power, and from Greece a finer treasure of culture and beauty, but from the Hebrews we have received an infinitely richer blessing of religious revelation and redemption.

From the mountain summits of Palestine have flowed streams of truth and grace that are now everywhere fertilizing the world and blooming on every shore.

We are also impressed with the enormous interest and vitality and perennial fruitfulness of the Old Testament. Recording the history of an obscure people hidden away in a little corner of the world, this book outweighs in value all the literature, not only of ancient Babylon and Egypt, but also of Greece and Rome. It laid down the foundations of our law and government, ethics and religion and whole civilization.

Although its light is dimmed in the splendor of the New Testament, it is still essential to our knowledge of God's way in redemption. As teachers we should so study it that we shall find that its words are light and life.

THIRD QUARTER

The Exile and the Restoration

LESSON I.—JULY 2

EZEKIEL, THE WATCHMAN OF ISRAEL

The Duty of Warning Others

Golden Text: Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. Isa. 55:6–7.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 121.

Reference Material: II Kings, 17:13–14; Isa. 6:1–13; Jer. 1:1–19; Matt. 23:37–39; Acts, 20:18–21, 16–27, 29–31.

Lesson Text: Ezekiel, 2:1–6; 3:17–21

And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.

2 And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me.

3 And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, *even* unto this very day.

4 For *they are* impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD.

5 And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they *are* a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.

6 ¶ And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns *be* with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they *be* a rebellious house.

17 Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.

18 When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

19 Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

20 Again, When a righteous *man* doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

21 Nevertheless, if thou warn the righteous *man*, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *Stand Upon Thy Feet.*
2. *People of Our Own Speech.*
4. *Wings and Wheels.*
4. *The Watchman Sent to His Work.*
5. *Our Responsibility for Others.*

Ezekiel was one of the great prophets of Judah. The details of his biography are meager. He was born in Jerusalem in the reign of Josiah and carried off into captivity in Babylon with the first captives along with king Jehoiachin. He was married and lived in his own house with a colony of Jews near Babylon, who enjoyed considerable freedom, probably only paying tribute or taxes to the Babylonian king.

Ezekiel was highly imaginative in thought and style, clothing his visions and prophecies in the garb of elaborate pictures and symbols.

The first chapter contains a description of the wonderful chariot with the living creatures and wheels, which represent the Spirit of God in his providence. The many-faced creatures are his messengers or angels, the flashing fires are the forces of nature, the wheels and wings full of eyes are God's omniscient presence as they run swiftly through his creation bringing all things under their burning gaze, and the whole vision is framed in a glow and blaze of light which is the all-enveloping glory of God.

The early prophecies in the first half of the book relate to Jerusalem, where the people were in a terrible state of demoralization and the final destruction of the ill-fated city was impending.

1. Stand Upon Thy Feet

The dazzling glory of the Lord smote the prophet prone upon his face, for too much light strikes the eyes blind, and no one can see God and live. Then the prophet heard a voice that said, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee."

Lying upon the face before the Lord is a proper and becoming attitude as expressing our sense of dependence and humility in his presence. Yet we are not to lie on our faces too long, for we do

no work in that position, and presently we shall hear a voice bidding us to arise and stand upon our feet.

This means that God respects our dignity and power as persons and does not want us always to assume an attitude of passive dependence. He has created us in his own image and breathed into us his own breath of life so that he has made man "but little lower than God" (Ps. 8:3).

This high rank and dignity of man is expressed in his erect posture, which puts him above every beast and marks him as being master of himself and of the earth. We therefore refuse in the exercise of our worth and freedom and independence to fall prostrate before a fellow man, leaving that attitude to slaves and subjects of kings.

Democracy will not tolerate such a position, and we all stand in one another's presence as being on an equality. And God does not want us to assume an attitude of abject cringing servility before him, for he is not a tyrant to crush us into fear and forced slavery, but he is our Father who would have us conscious of our freedom and dignity and high standing as his sons.

The erect attitude is also proper as indicating our readiness to go on any mission and do the work committed to us. Let the pagan believers in worldly means of conquest lie upon their faces, for "they are brought down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright" (Ps. 20:8).

2. People of Our Own Speech

Let us note that the prophet was "not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel" (verse 6). Foreign missionaries usually go to peoples of "strange speech and a hard language," and this erects a barrier between them and their work that may require months and years of severe toil to overcome.

Ezekiel was spared any such obstruction and discouragement by being sent to his own people to whom he could speak in their own mother tongue and could thus bring his message home to their own business and bosoms.

In our work in our homes and churches we are happy in being able to speak to our own kindred and our friends and have close

access to their thoughts and hearts. Still we need to study our words and methods that we may speak to others on religious subjects in the wisest and most tactful way and not repel them or make religion in any degree distasteful to them.

It was to be presumed that the people would hear a prophet of their own tongue and blood, speaking to them on the subject of their highest good, and yet the prophet was warned that "the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee," for "they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day."

People do many unexpected and unreasonable things, and the most unreasonable of all their strange actions is to refuse to hear a prophet delivering a divine message.

Their enmity to the prophet, however, may be rooted in a deeper enmity to God himself.

People may scorn the church and the Bible and deny all religion because they will not have God in their thoughts. Worldly living may gradually harden the heart until there is no feeling for spiritual aspiration and divine fellowship.

4. Wings and Wheels

The prophet heard the noise of the wings and wheels and felt himself carried away to the scene of his prophecy.

The meaning of the symbol is that he was under the direction of the Spirit of God. The prophet's vivid imagination was the means through which this impression was conveyed to him, and however pictorial the image it expressed to him the real truth.

We may not see chariots with wings and wheels full of eyes, but we may as surely be under the direction of God and have a consciousness of his presence and providence as though we rode in one of his flaming chariots through the sky.

Yet the prophet went in bitterness of spirit. "I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was upon me." It was an unwelcome errand on which he went to his people and it filled his soul with deep sadness.

We should ever guard against the assumption or spirit of Pharisaic superiority or self-righteousness or harshness in delivering the divine message to others, and though our hearts may be sorrowful with a sense of their sin we should speak the truth in patience and love.

But the hand of the Lord was strong upon the prophet, he was driven on by the pressure of the divine Spirit to tell the terrible truth to a rebellious people.

There are times when we are reluctant to do our duty, but we should strive to be so possessed with a sense of our mission and message that we will feel that the very hand of God is upon us and that we must go forward wheresoever he leads.

4. The Watchman Sent to His Work

The prophet heard a voice, saying, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me."

The watchman is a very important person in life at many points. In war he is stationed at the outpost of the camp or trench to give warning of the approach of the enemy. On his sleepless vigilance may depend the whole safety of the army and of the country, and so fateful may be the consequences of any dereliction of his duty that the penalty for disobedience is death.

In the bank and store the watchman is placed at night to guard against theft and fire, and if he leaves his post the bank may be robbed and the building burn down.

Along the railway he keeps watch over track and switch and bridge to see that everything is in right order, and were he to be neglectful for a single hour a train might plunge through disaster to death.

God has these and other watchmen in the world. They are the parents in the home, the teachers in the school, the ministers in the pulpit, the physicians to whom is committed the health of people, the editors of the press, the policemen and civil officers and statesmen to whom are committed the affairs of government; all who are in positions of care over others are charged with this high duty of keeping guard, giving alarm and protecting their lives and interests.

If we are unfaithful or careless in this vital work we endanger the welfare of the home and school and church and community and state and may send many lives to ruin. We should realize our privilege and responsibility and keep faithful watch at the point in the world where God has stationed us.

5. Our Responsibility for Others

Responsibility for others is impressed upon the prophet in the closing verses of our lesson. When he failed to give warning to the wicked their blood was to be upon him.

The wicked man must bear the consequences of his own iniquity, for every one must eat of the fruit of his own doings and every man's sin is his own act, but none the less would the unfaithful prophet be held responsible if he let an evil doer go down the wrong path without his warning.

> **Life is very complicated, its threads are all interwoven so that no one can go either wrong or right without others being involved with him in the evil or the good.**

In like manner when a righteous man goes astray and the prophet fails to warn him, both shall bear the blame, though it may be in unequal measure. But if the prophet is faithful to his duty and warns the sinner, though the sinner keeps on his evil way and plunges over its fatal brink, the prophet has cleared his own skirts and saved his own soul.

> **All this is simply an emphatic expression of the solidarity of interest and duty that binds us all together into a social organism in which each is responsible for all, and all are responsible for each.**

In so far as we might have turned others from an evil way by our teaching and example we should answer for them; and we keep our own souls clear only as we fully discharge our duty to them. Yet this is a measure of our high rank and power, and is not to be viewed as a millstone around our necks to drag us down, but rather as the wheels and wings of our power to reach and bless multitudes of people. From this point of view we are laden with a heavy burden of responsibility, and often may be splattered with the blood of lost souls.

> **It is this principle that is widening our sense of social responsibility and service. The growing social complexity and interrelated-**

ness of our modern world is bringing home to us with new breadth and meaning the fact that we are each one our brother's keeper and that we should be keenly sensitive to his condition and needs.

We should never go by on the other side of the road and leave any wounded member of our community to his fate, but we should go over to him and help to take care of him. We now have marvelous wheels and wings to go as the messengers and ministers of God to do his will and work of mercy among all the children of men.

LESSON II.—JULY 9

DANIEL INTERPRETING NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

God's World-Kingdom: Its Nature and Progress

Golden Text: The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. Rev. 11:15.

Devotional Reading: Isa. 11:1–10.

Reference Material: Isa. 9:6-7, 13, 14, 47; Dan. 4:30, 34-37; John, 18:33-38; Rev. 11:1

Lesson Text: Daniel, 2:36–45, 47

36 ¶ This *is* the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.

37 Thou, O king, *art* a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.

38 And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou *art* this head of gold.

39 And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

40 And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all *things:* and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

41 And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay.

42 And *as* the toes of the feet *were* part of iron, and part of clay, *so* the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.

43 And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

45 Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream *is* certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

47 The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth *it is,* that your God *is* a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *Kingdoms of This World.*
2. *A Kingdom Not of This World.*
3. *The Stone Cut out of the Mountain.*
4. *A Great God.*

The prophetic style, so highly figurative in Ezekiel, grows still more symbolical in Daniel, the first apocalypse in the Bible, Revelation being the only other book of Scripture of the same kind, though there are apocalyptic passages in other books, as in the Gospels.

An apocalypse is a book which was designed to sustain and comfort the people in times of great persecution, and it is a mode of representation that was understood by the readers for whom it was written, while it concealed under its figurative language its purpose from the persecuting enemies.

Such a book was of great service in its own time, and while its style has passed out of our speech yet these books are still of use to us for their inspiring views of God's presence and providence in the world, "keeping watch above his own."

When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in the days of Jehoiakim he gave orders that some choice selected Hebrew boys should be brought to Babylon and put to school that they might receive the best Babylonian education and rise to places in the king's service. Daniel was one of these Hebrew boys, and he immortalized himself in his career in Babylon. The king had a dream and, though he had forgotten it and could not recall it, yet he demanded of his wise men or dream interpreters that they both tell the dream and then give its interpretation, and the penalty for failure to do this hard thing was to be the death of all the astrologers in the kingdom.

In vain did they plead the impossibility of such a demand, but the king would not yield the point until Daniel came forward with the solution of the situation, giving both the dream and its interpretation.

1. Kingdoms of This World

The dream first contained a vision of four kingdoms of the world, symbolized as a "great image, whose brightness was excellent, . . . and the form thereof was terrible." Its head was of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of brass, and its legs and feet were of iron mixed with clay. The head of fine gold signified the Babylonian kingdom of which Nebuchadnezzar

was king, who is then described in terms that would flatter and inflate his utmost pride, a worldwide kingdom that threw its shadow over all the children of men and over the very beasts of the field.

This golden kingdom, however, was to be succeeded by others of an increasingly inferior grade symbolized by the silver breast, the brass belly, and the legs and feet of iron mixed with clay.

These three succeeding kingdoms, ending in division and displacement by the kingdom set up by the God of heaven, are variously interpreted by scholars, but the interpretation now generally adopted is that they represent the Median, the Persian and the Grecian empires. Nothing of importance, however, depends on this point: the general fact is that these various elements symbolize the kingdoms of this world and the figure applies to them as they have existed in all ages.

We do not find any kingdom composed wholly of any one of these elements, but they are mixed in various degrees and proportions. Gold is a precious and enduring element, and it is found in all kingdoms and governments, whether autocratic empires, or constitutional kingdoms, or democratic republics. There must be some gold in any and every government however corrupt, or it could not stand a day; it must have in it some iron to stiffen it and some gold to give it worth.

But neither is any human government composed of pure gold or of perfect elements, for every government on earth is more or less mixed with silver, or brass, or iron, or clay; in fact, all of these elements are intermixed with the best as with the worst governments, as all history and experience prove. The best we can do is to have as little clay and as much gold as possible in our image.

The silver and the brass and the iron are also necessary, for there must be elements of stiffness and staunchness, of law and justice and penalty, of armor and defense, as well as the finer arts and graces in the fabric of our civilization. The increasing degeneracy of these successive kingdoms seems to point to a law of history by virtue of which strong kingdoms are succeeded by weaker ones, ending in one with clay feet that goes to pieces and is absorbed in some other kingdom. History is a vast graveyard full of the tombstones of such buried empires.

Government is the greatest and most complex fabric that human hands build, but it is beset with weaknesses that so far have finally wrought its downfall and ruin. Nothing of human construction is imperishable, and here we have no abiding city but we look for one which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

2. A Kingdom Not of This World

Such a kingdom was symbolized and predicted in this vision in striking language: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

That opens a new volume in the history of the world and raises hopes that soar above all human dreams. We have had enough attempts at world empires built by the sword on human bones and blood. God now announces that he will take a hand in the business of building a kingdom, and any structure that he builds will not be mixed with baser metals and stand on clay feet, but will be of pure gold and solid iron and will stand on the Rock of Ages.

This eternal kingdom is represented and in some degree embodied in the kingdom of God as it is now rising in this world. This kingdom is the central and increasing subject of Bible revelation and teaching and especially does it fill large space in the teaching of Christ, for in the Gospels the kingdom is referred to more than a hundred times whereas the church is mentioned only twice.

This kingdom is also symbolized in Revelation, the other apocalyptic book in the Bible, as a city coming down to earth from heaven, having streets of gold and gates of pearls. We are building a copy of the heavenly city in the glory-land right down on this earth; even now its jeweled walls are rising around our horizon and we are laying its golden pavements under our feet.

This is the meaning of all our worship and work, preaching and teaching in the church and Sunday school, missions, home and foreign, education, sanitation, civic reform, social improvement, increasing justice in our legislation, broadening democracy, growing world unity in consciousness and conscience among all nations heading towards the abatement of war and the building of a Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

The signs of its coming are slow and small after all these centuries, yet surely we can discern one increasing purpose running through the ages as the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.

Building this kingdom is the great business to which we are called as Christians. It is incomparably the greatest and most

promising and pressing work in the world, and it will lift us out of our low and little lives into a grand vision of worldwide service, into a life that will make us great and hide our lives with Christ in God. It puts us into the glorious company of the kingdom builders of all ages, prophets, apostles, martyrs, missionaries, preachers and Christian workers, and gives us the greatest opportunity of this world to make our lives count as something worth while.

This kingdom will continue to come in this world, and finally it will melt and merge into the eternal kingdom that "shall stand for ever."

3. The Stone Cut Out of the Mountain

The worldly kingdoms of mixed elements degenerating into clay feet in the dream were broken into pieces by a "stone cut out of the mountain without hands."

This is a symbol of the Jewish Messiah and of the historic Christ who is now in the world in the person of his Spirit to redeem the world and rebuild it into the kingdom of God. He is universally present everywhere pushing this kingdom into being, "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

The stone is cut out of the great mountain of God, the mountain of his eternity and power and sacrifice and love. It is cut out "without hands," and this is a distinctive mark of this means of building the kingdom. Men are slow to perceive and believe in any other agency than "hands," or material agencies that can be seen and felt and measured.

They believe in human hands and in hands of steel and brass that throb with steam or electricity and build skyscrapers, or drive locomotives and steamships and immense systems of machinery, or make great guns that can destroy cities and kill thousands of their fellow men. But they are skeptical of invisible forces that work without hands.

God has no hands of flesh and blood, for he has his Holy Spirit who is everywhere present in the world and is ever working behind walls and veils of flesh in human hearts.

Christ does need and call for our human hands to help him carry out his Great Commission in making disciples of all the nations, but he also works invisibly to energize and guide all forces in the building of his kingdom.

However slowly it may seem to be coming, this kingdom is coming and finally it may break in pieces, as sunshine shatters ice, all the kingdoms of this world and replace them, and then there will go up in heaven a great shout, saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

4. A Great God

The King of Babylon was astonished at the revelation Daniel had made both of his dream and its interpretation and exclaimed, "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret."

The pagan king spoke better than he knew. He had some conception of God and perceived that the Hebrew God surpassed all his own gods in wisdom and power; yet how contracted and crude was his idea of God compared with that of the Hebrew prophets as it has been enlarged and enriched in our Christian faith!

Job had a magnificent conception of God as set forth in Jehovah's grand description of his revelation of himself in nature, but we see a loftier and more splendid revelation of God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our God is indeed a great God, stretching forth the curtain of the heavens and emitting the constellations as the dew of his breath, but he does infinitely more than this for us in revealing to us the secret of eternal life.

LESSON III.—JULY 16

THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

How to Enforce the Judgment Against Strong Drink

Golden Text: God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Eccl. 12:14.

Devotional Reading: Isa. 35.

Reference Material: Gen. 19:1–28; Ex. 14:21–31; Ezek. 31:1–14; Acts, 20:20–23.

Lesson Text: Daniel, 5:17–28

17 ¶ Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

18 O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour:

19 And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.

20 But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him:

21 And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling *was* with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and *that* he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

22 And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this;

23 But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou and thy lords, thy wives and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath *is*, and whose *are* all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:

24 Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.

25 ¶ And this *is* the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

26 This *is* the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

27 TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

28 PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. *A Splendid Answer.*
2. *A Proud Father.*
3. *The Son of His Father.*
4. *Strange Letters on the Wall.*
5. *Swift Judgment.*

Nebuchadnezzar has disappeared, and we find Belshazzar in his place.

A great feast was being celebrated, at which the king and a thousand of his lords drank wine and revelry was unconfined. Wine unbinds all restraints and the intoxicated king madly rushed into daring desecration. He ordered the sacred vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, to be brought into the banqueting hall that drunken lords and women might drink wine from them and praise their heathen gods of wood and stone!

This insult to the true and living God did not long go unavenged. A bodiless hand crept forth from the sleeve of night and wrote strange words on the plastered wall of the palace.

Instantly the king was stricken with a panic and paralysis of fear that blanched his face and unloosed his joints. He cried for the astrologers to read the writing, promising rich rewards, but these reputed wise men could not decipher the unknown words. Still the fiery letters gleamed and burned upon the wall and still the consternation among the terror-stricken revelers grew.

At length the queen remembered Daniel and assured the king that he could read the writing. Into the gorgeous banquet hall the Hebrew youth was ushered and stood the observed of all observers. Belshazzar pointed to the enigmatical words on the wall and told the captive that if he would interpret them he should be clothed in a purple robe, have a gold chain about his neck, and be third ruler in the kingdom.

1. A Splendid Answer

Daniel heard the splendid promise, and answered after a still more splendid manner. Let the king keep his gifts and give his rewards to another: he would not sell his divine wisdom and perform his duty for such mercenary considerations; nevertheless he would read the writing unto the king and make known the interpretation.

Here was a man that moved in a higher sphere than this empurpled king.

Belshazzar knew no motives but those that could be expressed in material terms. Purple and gold and kingdom were the most potent words in his vocabulary. He thought that of course these would dazzle the Hebrew captive and secure from him his utmost servility and service.

But these words had no effect at all upon Daniel and rolled off him impotent, because they did not touch the deepest springs of his nature. He lived under the power of the unseen spiritual world, and material things could not move him because they had no compelling affinity with him. Daniel was subject only to duty. Gold could not buy him, but conscience instantly controlled him.

We live in a day when material forces are still strong, and purple and gold are among the most persuasive and powerful words of human speech. We need to shake ourselves loose from such motives and simply do our duty irrespective of such rewards.

2. A Proud Father

Daniel proceeded to address the king in a speech that was as bold and brave as it was eloquent. He began with the king's father, for to understand a man's success or failure we must go back and see what instruction and opportunities he has had, what privileges he has improved or abused.

Daniel told the king that the most high God had given Nebuchadnezzar a great kingdom that overshadowed the world and clothed him with power to put men up or down at pleasure.

Daniel had no narrow views of Jehovah as though he were a local god, but knew him as the God of the whole world, We must beware of circumscribing God's presence and providence within Christian bounds and know that his hand disposes all the affairs of men.

This exaltation of Nebuchadnezzar, instead of humbling him into dependence and obedience to God, only caused him to lift up his heart and harden it in pride. He said to himself, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" With such swelling thoughts as these he walked his gardens and flattered his pride.

This is ever one of the dangers of worldly success, and such power is dearly purchased when it begets in us this spirit.

Nebuchadnezzar's pride went down before a terrible fall. He was deposed from his throne and appears to have been seized with a kind of insanity that led him to wander with the beasts and eat grass like an ox.

Have we not seen some such results from pride? Has it not brought many a high and haughty man down into the dust and caused him to eat bitter bread?

Such a fall, however, was a mercy to Nebuchadnezzar and was the means of his rise.

3. The Son of His Father

This was Daniel's sermon, and now he gave it pointed and powerful personal application. He was not afraid of his audience, even when that audience was one man who held life and death in his hand.

"And thou his son," were the startling words with which he began his application. No indirect allusions veiled his point, no honeyed phrases sweetened his speech, but he shot straight at his mark with his swiftest and sharpest words.

"And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this." With the warning of his father before him, the son had willfully trod directly in his steps.

Is not this the darkest phase of our sin, that we have walked in the way of evil though we knew its wrong and its ruin? We cannot plead ignorance as an excuse for our waywardness, because we know better.

Daniel specified Belshazzar's evil deeds in a terrible catalogue. He had lifted up himself against the Lord of heaven, and desecrated the vessels of his house, and praised gods of silver and wood and stone, and had not glorified the God in whose hand was his breath.

These ancient sins have assumed modern forms and are still in the world and not far from every one of us. Every evil thought or deed lifts itself up against God and desecrates the vessels of the mind and heart and offers him shame instead of glory.

4. Strange Letters on the Wall

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN, were the letters that the hand had inscribed upon the wall.

All foreign words look strange and even terrifying to us, and these Aramaic

words frightened the Babylonian king and lords. But they were Daniel's native language and he read them off and gave their interpretation.

Mene means numbered, and its interpretation was, "God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it." Belshazzar thought himself at the height of his power and glory and would have derided the possibility of a fall. It is true that the Persians were already besieging his city, but this would make no impression upon the infatuated king, blinded with pride and drunken with wine. Yet at the very height of his pride God had numbered his days and appointed their end.

We build ourselves up in power and think ourselves secure, when already our days are numbered and our end draws nigh. This fact should rebuke and wither our pride, turn us in trust to God, and teach us to number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Tekel means weighed, and its interpretation was "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." Belshazzar's crown, that seemed to outweigh all the world, in the scales of God was but a bauble, and Belshazzar himself was of light weight.

All things earthly are cast into these scales and have their true value determined. In nothing are men's judgment further astray than in their estimates of weight and worth.

The difference between the savage and the civilized man comes out most strongly in their estimates of values, and the same judgment marks and measures the difference between the bad man and the good man. Beads and buttons are worth more in Africa than bank bills and books, and in many a Christian home gold is rated higher than grace.

Many a thing that in the estimate of men bulks large and weighs heavy, in the scales of God is found to be a bauble or bubble as light as air. Most men's estimate of themselves must undergo some reduction when tried in the divine scales, and many a man that is supposed to be of massive substance and worth when put to this test will be found wanting.

Peres, the singular of upharsin, means divided, and its interpretation was, "Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." A kingdom built on mere power and pride could not last: it drew against itself constantly increasing opposition that finally overcame it.

The path of the centuries is strewn thick with the spoils of empires that were divided amongst their enemies.

Such was the doom that was written down against this Babylonian king, and the same judgments still come forth from the hand of God and may be written against us. The world has recently witnessed just such a downfall of an empire and an emperor whose pride caused it to proclaim its domination over the world, and it went crashing down into tremendous ruin.

We need in our satisfaction if not exultation over such judgment to beware that as a nation we do not develop the same sense of power and pride and begin to exercise the same spirit of domination among the nations, lest the same judgment overtake us.

5. Swift Judgment

"In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain." So swiftly did execution follow the sentence. The Persian army gained an entrance into the city, swept through its streets and palaces in slaughter, and Belshazzar and his nobles were slain drunk.

May not the whole disaster be traced to the debauchery of the wine cup? Intoxication bred weakness, and led to sacrilege that paved the way for Persian retribution and triumph.

The wine cup has caused the downfall of many a king and kingdom, prince and noble, lord of wealth and man of genius, as well as countless men in the common ranks of life. No station is too high to be exempt from its fatal fascination and terrible downfall, and no one is so low that it cannot sink him lower.

It has had its way so long and has made such a wide and deep display of its power to assassinate the brain and sully and corrupt the heart and ruin homes and threaten the very fabric of the social order that our country has at length risen against it and put it under absolute prohibition, even as China put the similar evil of the opium habit under its ban.

We have gained this great outpost of victory, but we must still make the victory good and complete and final by closing in on every resort and device by which the law may be evaded and exterminating the last remnant and relic of it. This calls for patience and perseverance and bravery, but it can be done, and may God help us do it.

LESSON IV.—JULY 23

DANIEL AND THE LIONS

Trials and Triumphs of Faith

Golden Text: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. Heb. 11:33.

Devotional Reading: Rom. 8:31–39.

Reference Material: Jer. 38; Dan. 3; Acts, 12:1–19; 23:12–35; Heb. 11:32–40.

Lesson Text: Daniel, 6:16–23

16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast *him* into the den of lions. *Now* the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.
17 And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.
18 ¶ Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him.
19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.
20 And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: *and* the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?
21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.
22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me: and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.
23 Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *Unyielding Devotion in Prayer.*
2. *Hypocritical Loyalty to Law.*
3. *A Perplexed King.*
4. *Daniel in the Den.*
5. *A Strange Deliverance.*

Hebrew boys in captivity had a way of rising to positions of responsibility and power, and presently we find Daniel, like Joseph in Egypt, a ruler in the very country where he was a captive.

Babylon was divided into one hundred and twenty provinces, each governed by a satrap; over the satraps were three presidents, and Daniel was one of these presidents.

By his superior ability and wisdom he rose to distinction and became conspicuous above all other officials. This drew upon him their envy and hatred, and they were soon busy plotting his ruin.

They first spied upon his official conduct, but could find nothing there to allege against him. Then they said they never could catch him unless they could ensnare him in his religion. They knew that "the law of his God" was his strong point, and that if they could hit him there they would hit him hard.

A cunning trap was now devised and set for him. The presidents and satraps counseled Darius to issue an interdict that if any one should ask a petition of any god or man save the king for thirty days, he should be cast into the den of lions. Darius signed the decree and these conspirators felt sure that they had this hated Jew caught.

1. Unyielding Devotion in Prayer

When Daniel knew the writing was signed he went into his house and prayed at his open window with his face towards Jerusalem three times a day, as he did aforetime.

Did this not seem like unnecessary publicity and boldness in his devotions? Might he not have continued his prayer secretly, and thus have avoided trouble? In view of the great issues at stake, his position as president and his protection of his own people, might he not have been justified in omitting his prayers altogether for thirty days? Only thirty days, he could surely drop his public and even his private piety thirty days in order to maintain his position.

Not so thought Daniel. Prayer was the tie that bound him to God, the open channel through which he derived strength from him. Cut this tie and he would be severed from God; choke up this channel, and his strength would wither. The inflexible principle of his life was that he ought to obey God rather than men, and the path of obedience, though it led to a den of lions, was the path from which no opposition could drive him or threats could frighten him.

As for secret devotions, Daniel was no coward. He had always prayed at his open window with his face towards Jerusalem, not in ostentation, but

after the manner of the Jews, and he would not yield this point when it involved the whole principle. He never had been ashamed of his religion from the days of his youth when he refused to defile himself with the king's meat, and he would not in his days of greatness turn traitor and stultify himself.

So, promptly at the regular hour, he appeared at his window and prayed and gave thanks before his God. The habit of a lifetime now sustained him and held him true to the God of his fathers.

We should have a habit of prayer that nothing can break. The old decree of the Babylonian king assumes modern forms. Business may bid us to omit our regular worship and bow at the shrine of wealth. Fashion and pleasure may be so imperious in their demands as to leave no time or disposition for our devotions. Worldliness is skeptical of prayer and asks what good it is anyway: why not omit it altogether?

Against all these decrees we should hold fast to our faith and be systematic and strenuous in prayer before God.

2. Hypocritical Loyalty to Law

The conspirators were watching Daniel and soon had abundant evidence that he was breaking the decree. Then they came to the king, recited the facts concerning the signing of the interdict, and secured his admission that "the thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not."

A surprise was then sprung on the king. They answered, "That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day."

Here was a masterly piece of machination against Daniel. First, these enemies had the law on him. Having caught him with their crafty decree, they now made a great show of loyalty to the law, they came out strongly on the side of the constitution. It was not the last time that legal decrees, which in general are intended to effect good ends, were turned into cunning devices for working evil.

Law is one of the great safeguards of justice and liberty, but it has often been perverted to bad ends. Was not our national Constitution used as the chief bulwark of slavery? and has not the plea of "unconstitutional" been planted in the way of many a reform?

Next, these conspirators tried to raise prejudice against their victim by calling him "that Daniel, which is of the captivity of the children of Judah." They poisoned their charge with the bitterest race enmity the world has ever known.

To this day in some countries to call a man a "Jew" is to brand him with one of the deepest marks of disfavor and hatred; and since the Great War there has been a widespread recrudescence of anti-Semitism which has become an organized propaganda in many countries. This is an unjust and cruel prejudice which Christians should disown and oppose.

Calling names is everywhere a favorite means of affixing a stigma upon an opponent, and it has been known to do service even on behalf of Christian truth.

Lastly, they alleged that the Jew regarded not the king but persisted in making his petition three times a day. Here Daniel's heroism in duty was used to secure his condemnation.

It is one of the tragedies of the moral world that duty may lead to a lions' den.

3. A Perplexed King

This news came to the king as an unexpected and most painful disclosure. He knew nothing of the crafty device that was concealed in the decree and had signed it innocent of any wrong thought towards Daniel. He had discovered the worth of Daniel as an able and incorruptible official, and did not want to lose such a man, especially through the conspiracy of his rivals to crush him.

The king was sorely distressed at the situation and set his wits to work to deliver his faithful minister. All day long he labored at the problem. The corrupt officials, however, took care that he should reach no solution by reminding him that no decree which the king had established could be changed.

It does not appear why he might not have cut the hard knot with his sword and boldly have told these men that, if they interfered with Daniel, he would throw them to the lions.

But the unchangeableness of his own decree seems to have paralyzed his will and borne him helpless on its current. The king did the mischief when he signed the blasphemous decree, and now he was imprisoned in his own evil action.

This is the fateful nature of all wrong doing.

4. Daniel in the Den

So the king issued the order that the decree should be executed. Daniel was carried to the lions' den. The king, however, had a parting word with him that showed the king's faith and that must have cheered Daniel. "Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee."

This is a wonderful tribute to the religious character and conduct of Daniel. He had so lived that the heathen king believed that the God of such a man would surely deliver him. Later the king issued a decree calling upon all his subjects to pay reverence to "the God of Daniel."

God came to be known through Daniel, as a man may come to be known through his famous son. This is letting our light so shine before men that they will see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

Daniel was now dropped into the den, and its mouth was closed with a stone and sealed with the king's signet. The enemies of Daniel were delighted beyond measure at the success of their devilish device. They chuckled and roared as they thought of how easily they had deceived the king and caught the Jew. Wine flowed freely, and there was many a joke and ribald song at the expense of their victim.

The king passed a very different night. Sleep fled from him, no instruments of music or dancing girls were brought in to entertain him, but he fasted all night long in an agony of suspense.

And Daniel—how did Daniel spend this night? Daniel was alone with the lions—and with God. There are still lions' dens in the world into which many a good man is dropped. The lions of temptation and trial, of slander and persecution, of disaster and death, are ravenous against the righteous, and many an innocent and brave man is flung by his enemies into their jaws.

Few are the prophets of the race that have escaped this den. Socrates and Isaiah and Paul met this fate, and many a modern leader of liberty and progress has been dropped into this pit.

One greater than all human prophets went the same way, and his cross stands as the supreme climax of human hate and divine sacrifice.

Let us not think it strange if in some measure the same trial should overtake us and we should hear the growl of lions. The

devil still goes about as a roaring lion, and there are plenty of men who are his minions to do his work.

5. A Strange Deliverance

How did this case issue? With the earliest gray of the morning the king hastened to the den and called with a lamentable voice to Daniel to know if his God had been able to deliver him. It must have been an intense moment of mingled fear and hope with the king as he listened for a reply.

The voice of Daniel came back clear and calm, telling the king that God had found him innocent and had sent his angels to shut the lions' mouths so that they had done him no hurt.

The king was filled with great joy, had Daniel taken up out of the den, and ordered the conspirators to be thrown in, who were torn to pieces before ever they reached the bottom of the pit.

So Daniel was strangely delivered from the den that was intended to destroy him and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in and was faithful to his God.

Sometimes justice gets done in this world, and in every den of lions God is present keeping watch above his own. Even had Daniel been torn to pieces, yet would he have been in God's hands and would have received a heavenly deliverance.

Faith is not always answered and rewarded with an earthly deliverance, the fiery trial may burn the body to ashes, but the spirit passes through the flames scatheless and is ever commended and committed to the Father of spirits.

LESSON V.—JULY 30

THE FIRST RETURN FROM EXILE

Striking Manifestations of God's Providence

Golden Text: We know that all things work together for good to them that love God. Rom. 8:28.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 100.

Reference Material: Haggai, 1:1–2:23; Isa. 62; Rev. 21:1–22:5.

Lesson Text: Jeremiah, 29:10; Ezra, 1:1–8, 11

10 ¶ For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying,

2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah.

3 Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which *is* in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill offering for the house of God that *is* in Jerusalem.

5 ¶ Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem.

6 And all they that *were* about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, besides all *that* was willingly offered.

7 ¶ Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

11 All the vessels of gold and of silver *were* five thousand and four hundred. All *these* did Sheshbazzar bring up with *them of* the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *A New Era Opens.*
2. *A Passionate Dream.*
3. *Volunteers Called For.*
4. *Sifting Out the Emigrants.*
5. *Sacred Vessels Returned.*

We have reached another turning-point in the history of the Jewish people.

Captivity has done its work. No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

This was the effect of the exile on the Jews. It forever shattered the power of idolatry over them by showing them its awful degradation; taught them the spirituality of religion; made them appreciate their own land and religious institutions, especially the Sabbath and the Scriptures; welded together the remnants of the twelve tribes like iron in a furnace; brought them into contact with the great world and thus lifted them out of their provincialism and widened their theological views and their national sympathies; and sifted the nation and sent back the purest seed to restock the land.

Out of the Euphratean valley of dry bones rose a new nation that was politically dependent and weak, but was spiritually purer and stronger. Loss often ends in larger gain. The seed falls into the ground and perishes, but it springs up, blossoming and bearing fruit many fold. The chemist extracts from scum and dross the most beautiful dyes and the most exquisite perfumes.

Out of the lowest dregs of humanity God can fashion saints. Trial and tears can be transmuted into serenity, ashes into beauty, and a spirit of heaviness into a garment of praise.

Out of the pit of Babylon came forth a purified and disciplined people, who were thereby prepared for their great mission in the world.

1. A New Era Opens

The new era opens with a heathen king in the foreground as the director of events.

Cyrus, the Persian, having made himself master of Persia, marched upon Babylon and soon had it in his grasp. In this old world, empire crashes upon empire, and one conqueror goeth and another conqueror cometh. Cyrus was the visible king, but back of him was the King invisible, immortal, eternal, who was the real power behind the throne.

Seventy years before, Jeremiah (29:10) had predicted the overthrow of Babylon and the release and return of the exiled people. The captives had worn out all the days of this appointed time in weary waiting and watching for the signs of fulfilment. Probably they themselves had a hand in the overthrow of cruel and hateful Babylon and the triumph of Cyrus, from whom they might have some hope.

Thus Cyrus was the instrument of fulfilling divine prophecy and purpose, though he knew it not and was only following his own plans.

God's eternal purpose shoots through all human plans and passions and draws all agents unconsciously into his service.

The Lord started this movement by stirring up the spirit of Cyrus to issue a proclamation. When God sets out to do something he immediately gets a man to do it. Without him we can do nothing, and without us he will do nothing. Cyrus was a heathen man, but the Lord stirred up his spirit, inspired him for the service.

Inspiration is broader than prophets and apostles and broods over the whole world. God is not limited in his access to human minds and hearts and can draw any soul into his service.

2. A Passionate Dream

Cyrus opened his proclamation by declaring that he had been charged by the Lord God of heaven to build him a house at Jerusalem.

Such language did not indicate any special faith in Jehovah on the part of Cyrus, for this was in accordance with the custom of the age, and he used the same kind of speech with reference to the national god of conquered Babylon. Nevertheless, he spoke truer than he knew, for he was, indeed, commissioned of Jehovah to do this very thing.

The chief objective in view in this return to Jerusalem was to "build the house of the Lord God of Israel." It was a religious movement, a grand national revival. The Jews had seen the utter folly and filthiness of idolatry and wanted to return to their own pure spiritual worship. The restored land was

to be publicly consecrated to the Lord their God, and henceforth they would be loyal to him.

Their return was to culminate in the rebuilt temple, which was the visible symbol and chief glory of their worship. Passionately they longed to see those walls rise again on Mount Zion, and Cyrus struck the most responsive and strongest chord in their hearts when he called upon them to go up to their beloved city and build the house of the Lord.

Religious enthusiasm is the most powerful motive that can inspire and sway men.

It led the Jews out of Egypt through the terrible wilderness into the promised land, and now it was about to lead them out of the Babylonian prison and carry them across a thousand miles of hot desert sand back into that same country.

3. Volunteers Called For

The proclamation called for volunteers for this return. It was not a forced repatriation of these exiles, but a voluntary exodus.

This was a wise principle and process, as it would sift out the most restless and rebellious, who were therefore the most dangerous in Babylon, as well as the ablest and most enterprising, who would therefore be most efficient in the new colony.

The kingdom of God is everywhere built on this voluntary principle and is thoroughly democratic in spirit. "Whosoever will" is its invitation.

Some things we must do because God makes us, but other things we may or may not do, because they are subject to our own choice and action. We may stay in a state of rebellion against and exile from God, our bones may bleach in the valley of sin, if we will; but we also have the sovereign power of responding to his call and returning to him. God's service is not slavery but fellowship.

All of the exiled Jews, however, did not choose to return. Various ties retained them. Some were too old and frail to undertake such a journey. Some lacked the adventurous spirit of emigrants. Others were rooted in that sandy soil through business and marriage and the graves of their dead. A considerable number thus chose to remain, while their more resolute brethren turned their faces towards the west.

All can enter into the kingdom of God, but there are particular forms of service all cannot enter. The missionary field at home and especially abroad calls for a picked class of pioneers. While a few brave spirits set out for the ends of the earth to build the house of the Lord in every land, the great mass of Christians must remain in their own place.

Those Jews that remained, however, were to help those that went. They were to supply the emigrants with silver and gold, with goods and beasts, and with free-will offerings for the temple. This movement thus had the support of the whole people, those that remained acting as a base of supplies for those that went.

We cannot all go into the mission field, but we can help to support those that do go.

4. Sifting Out the Emigrants

The hour for action was now arrived. The king's proclamation must have caused intense excitement among the captive Jews and been the subject of their talk and plans day and night. In every home the question was, Who can go and who must stay?

A process of selection thus sifted out the emigrants. These were of different classes. First among them are named the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin.

The fathers must be in the forefront of any movement that is going to succeed. Young men are needed for enterprise and energy, but these must be directed by the wisdom of the fathers, or they will miss the mark.

Next were the priests and Levites, men set apart and anointed to minister in the name of God. Man must reach up and clasp hands with God, if he would found a nation, or build a house, or wisely order his life.

No nation or society or home is complete that does not have in it the recognition and worship of God.

Lastly are mentioned "all whose spirit God had raised to go up": this is a general class, but it includes more especially the young and enthusiastic element.

We must always make room for youth and let their spirit have full vent in the enterprises of God.

The total number of emigrants was about fifty thousand (2:64–65), a good-sized army that started out on this long march of upwards of a thousand miles. These all "rose up" to return.

With all the incentives human and divine that moved them to take this course, they had themselves to rise up and set their feet in the sand of the desert day after day. However long grew the distance and weary their spirits, they had to carry on until their feet stood within the gates of their beloved city.

We must combine with any divine grace we receive our own grit or we never shall return to the Lord and reach any worthy objective either in this world or in the heavenly country.

5. Sacred Vessels Returned

The returning exiles were liberally supplied with means. Their remaining friends and even their heathen neighbors furnished them with money and outfits for their journey and with offerings for the temple.

Cyrus himself executed a fine stroke of political policy by ordering the treasurer to restore to the returning Jews the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple when he captured and sacked Jerusalem. There was an astonishing number of these, more than five thousand. These vessels that had been filched away from the temple and that Belshazzar had desecrated at the feast on the fatal night of his fall had thus been providentially preserved for the new temple.

Possibly Cyrus was glad to get rid of them with their fateful history and ominous associations. All these vessels did Sheshbazzar, or Zerubbabel, bring with the captives from Babylon to Jerusalem.

In returning to God we are not to come empty-handed, but are to bring with us all our treasures and use them in his service. Every vessel that has been desecrated by sinful use, every possession and power that we have acquired, should henceforth serve and glorify him.

God must not only have our penitence and faith, but also our means. Silver and gold are necessary in building the house and kingdom of God as well as men. No one is thoroughly converted

until the grace of God strikes clear through him and penetrates into his pocketbook.

Not only must ministers and missions be supported with money, but it is fitting that the house of God be furnished with precious things, vessels and adornments, that will render our worship more efficient and beautiful.

So should we return to our God now, and at last we shall be among the ransomed of the Lord that shall return to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.

LESSON VI.—AUGUST 6

THE TEMPLE REBUILT AND DEDICATED

What God's House Should Mean to a Community

Golden Text: My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. Psalm, 84:2.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 100.

Reference Material: Haggai, 1:1–2:23; Isa. 62; Rev. 21:1–21:5.

Lesson Text: Ezra, 3:10–13; 6:14–16

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he is* good, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished *it*, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

16 ¶ And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. The First Thing Put First.

2. Songs and Shouts of Joy.

3. Pessimism and Optimism.

4. Opposition to the Work.

5. The Temple Finished.

6. The Dedication.

The fifty thousand returning exiles found Jerusalem the heap of ruins that it had been left by Nebuchadnezzar fifty years before. They obtained temporary homes in the neighboring towns and then began the work of rebuilding the city.

1. The First Thing Put First

The first building they began was the temple of the Lord. The first part of the building erected was the altar and the daily offering of sacrifices according to the law of Moses was immediately reëstablished. Then the foundation of the main structure was laid.

Thus all the while that the temple was rising the smoke of sacrifice ascended and worship was combined with work. It might have been argued that these returned exiles should have rebuilt their homes before they erected the altar and began the temple. They did secure temporary lodgings (2:70), but they were right in beginning with the altar. That was the vital center of their city whence all its inspiration and activities were to radiate. It was their worship that inspired their work, and therefore they did well to put that first thing first.

The altar is the first structure that should be erected everywhere. God should have the first place in our plans, and worship should always precede work.

Our forefathers, in founding this country, among their first buildings in each settlement erected a church and started public worship. We have built all our civilization around this altar, and it is the foundation and core of our national greatness to-day.

In founding a home, let the altar of prayer be put in its center first. The home can be built up in purity and peace and power only as it is pervaded by worship. Every life should be built on this foundation stone, and all our plans should be inspired by prayer. Let us seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all needful things shall be added unto us.

2. Songs and Shouts of Joy

The laying of the foundation of the temple was accompanied with songs and shouts of joy. The priests were arrayed in their gorgeous official robes and the

instruments of music, long silent as they hung on the willows down in Babylon (Ps. 137:2), were brought forth.

David had organized a great temple choir and the musical service was now restored. The priests and Levites sang together by course or responsively, the soloists singing a strain which was then answered with a great burst of song by the chorus accompanied with the cymbals and all the instruments of music. All the people also shouted with a great shout. And thus they all praised and gave thanks unto the Lord, "because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel."

Though they were returned exiles in the midst of the ruins of their former city, yet they saw the goodness of the Lord in their situation and their hearts swelled and broke into song.

The Jews were a singing people through all their varied history, and this was one fountain of their faith and hope ever gushing up through their most adverse circumstances.

Worship has always instinctively wedded itself to the wings of song. Atheism is unsingable, but the angels at the birth of Jesus poured floods of melody from the choir gallery of the skies, and the gospel has ever since been singing its way through the world.

We ought all to join in the singing in the church service, and if we cannot sing we can at least shout. "Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee."

3. Pessimism and Optimism

The joy of the occasion, however, was mingled with sadness. Many of the old men, priests and Levites and heads of houses, who had seen the glory of the former temple that had been reared and enriched by the hand of Solomon, when they saw these rough foundations laid in the midst of the ruins of the former city wept and sobbed like children. They saw the golden age in the past and thought the former days were better than their own degenerate times.

Old men are apt to look backward and have sad thoughts over the passing of former days. The new ways look strange to them and they fear they are not as good as the old.

But "many shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off." Doubtless these were the younger men who faced forward rather than backward and saw the dawn of the coming glories rather than the fading of past

splendors. Youth is fresh in faith and hope and sees in present attainments a foundation on which to build a fair structure in the future.

The same foundation called forth such mingled sobbing and shouting that it was difficult to distinguish the one from the other until the younger people outshouted the older people and sent their hosannas rolling far out over the hills.

The same state of society or condition of the church may be viewed by some as degeneracy and coming ruin, and by others as indicating progress and coming triumph. Everything depends on the point of view, the backward or the forward look, and the temperament of the observer.

Looking our over the same world, some are pessimists and others are optimists, and such differences are rooted deep in faith and character and conduct and in the whole personality.

We should cultivate optimistic faith and temper and in present foundations see the coming temple. God did not live in the past only, but is alive to-day and forevermore; and whatever the achievements and glories of the past, he ever has some better thing in store for us.

4. Opposition to the Work

A serious obstruction now arose in the way of building the walls of the city. The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were rebuilding the temple (ch. 4).

These adversaries were the mixed race of the Samaritans, composed of the remnants and dregs of the Israelites that were left behind in the land and were amalgamated and debased with Assyrian colonists that were forcibly settled among them. Their religion was a corresponding mixture of the worship of Jehovah and idolatry (II Kings, 17:33).

These corrupt worshipers came up to Jerusalem and with smooth speech made a plausible proposal. "Let us build with you," they said: "for we seek your God, as ye do."

Zerubbabel and his chiefs rejected the proposal on the ground that, as he said to them, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God." These Samaritans were still in the mire of idolatry, from which horrible pit the Jews had just been rescued. The purified patriots knew that their national and spiritual life depended upon their keeping themselves unspotted from that filth. Therefore they would not associate with idolaters even in building the

temple. They had just come out from that class and would remain separate and touch not the unclean thing.

The speech of these adversaries was smooth and courteous, but so was the speech of the great Adversary that tempted Jesus.

We must look behind the speech to the speaker, and often what the speaker is spoils his speech. When impure or evil persons come to us saying, "Let us build with you," we should beware of their proposals and refuse to join in building a house with them.

These adversaries did not let up in their opposition when their proposal was rejected, but they showed their true attitude towards the new building by weakening the hands of the people and troubling the builders. They hired lawyers against them at court and stopped the work on the temple for fifteen years.

Yet under the next Persian king these obstructions were overcome, the work was renewed, and the temple was finally finished. They "weakened the hands of the people": how easy it is to do this! A word, a sinister look, a suspicious question, an anonymous letter, and it is done. It takes genius to paint a picture, but any boor can ruin it.

It takes no grace of mind or cunning of hand to weaken a good work; we can easily annoy and vex and obstruct others if we will.

5. The Temple Finished

The work was resumed and the elders were greatly encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. These men were helpers rather than hinderers, they encouraged and inspired the workers by their prophesying or preaching, declaring unto them the will of God.

The man of ideas is needed in building as well as the man with hands; mind is as necessary as muscle, brain not less than brawn. Ideas draw up plans and specifications and give direction and energy and enthusiasm to the work.

The prophet inspires men by his personality and is not less but more important in building than stone masons and carpenters. But all men with their gifts differing are necessary to the planning and pushing of the work, and each one should receive due recognition and reward.

"And they builded and finished it": they did not lose heart and quit with the walls halfway up, leaving a roofless and useless structure. Having put their hands to this plow they drove it to the end of the furrow and to the finishing of the field. They had grit as well as grace and in the face of opposition and many discouragements they carried the work on until the last stone was laid and their temple stood complete.

The grace and grit of perseverance are much needed in all our work, and it is a solemn teaching that no man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

6. The Dedication

It was a great day in Israel when the priests and people "kept the dedication of the house of God with joy." No doubt there was a great service with a throng of worshipers with a gorgeous ritual of offerings and incense and vested priests and instruments of music and antiphonal choirs.

There were no old men sobbing on that day, unless they were weeping tears of joy, and it was with triumphant gladness that they all entered into the great service.

To dedicate anything is to set it apart and devote it to a special cause or use, and in this sense we dedicate our churches to the worship of God. Having built and finished them we give them over to his service and thereafter they are to be restricted to this use.

Yet the worship of God always expresses itself in the welfare of men, and the church is not to be shut against any good work but is to be a community center and fountain of every kind of good to the people. Holiness and health and happiness are to flow from it in streams of teaching and activity. It is to be a place where we can gather and sing our most joyous songs and blow our most jubilant trumpets.

Dedication is to extend to all things, and we are to present our very bodies a living sacrifice unto God, which is our reasonable service.

LESSON VII.—AUGUST 13

ESTHER SAVES HER PEOPLE

Rendering Sacrificial Service

Golden Text: The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. Psalm, 34:17.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 34:1–8.

Reference Material: Matt. 20:20–28; Rom. 5:6–10; 12:1–2.

Lesson Text: Esther, 4:10–5:3

10 ¶ Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai;
11 All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, *there is* one law of his to put *him* to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.
12 And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.
13 Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.
14 For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, *then* shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?
15 ¶ Then Esther bade *them* return Mordecai *this answer*,
16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which *is* not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.
17 So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on *her* royal *apparel*, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house.
2 And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, *that* she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that *was* in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.
3 Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what *is* thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *A Monarch's Madness.*
2. *An Offended Official.*
3. *A Wicked Plot.*
4. *A Queen's Dangerous Venture.*
5. *Radiant Service.*

The name of God does not occur in the book of Esther, but that "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform" is the truth that is written large upon its pages. There are days when we cannot see the sun, but we do not doubt that it still shines, for its splendor sifts through the clouds and fills the world with diffused light.

God shines through the book of Esther, though he is not named. There is a hidden Hand that is moving through the scenes of this drama and causing all things to work together for good.

In this book Providence reaches far outside of the Holy Land and plucks a leaf from heathen history and binds it up with the writings of Isaiah and John and Paul; and yet through all these pages there runs one increasing purpose of divine grace.

1. A Monarch's Madness

Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, sat upon his Persian throne of power and splendor, the mightiest monarch of the world. His empire stretched from India to Egypt, and he was burning with ambition to extend it over Greece and Europe and leave no corner of the world that did not pay tribute to him.

In the third year of his reign he held a great festival to inaugurate this movement. His princes and servants were gathered from all parts of his dominion and for six months there was a prodigal display of pageantry and pomp.

The grand affair of state reached its climax in a great popular feast, in which for seven days wine flowed like water and revelry ran riot. This madness ended in a most disgraceful act on the part of the king. In his drunken folly he commanded that Vashti his queen be brought before the princes and people to display her beauty, an exhibition that would have been considered immodest and scandalous by these Eastern people.

Vashti showed unexpected independence and displayed bravery that has given her a high place among queenly heroines. She refused to obey such a shameful command and defied her drunken lord.

The imperious and passionate king instantly flushed hot with wrath and appealed to his princes to know what should be done with the rebellious queen. They set up a great cry that, if such conduct were tolerated in the queen, every man's wife would rise up against him and no man could rule in his own home!

So they urged the king to depose Vashti, which was quickly done. It was then necessary to supply a new queen, and Oriental methods were used to this end. The most beautiful maidens were gathered from the empire that the king might choose one for his queen.

Jews were scattered through the kingdom and some were in Shushan, the capital. What were the chances that one of these despised people would be chosen queen? Human probabilities would say not one in a million, but the course of affairs does not depend on human probability but on divine providence.

In Shushan was one Mordecai a Jew, who had adopted as his daughter his cousin Esther. The young Jewess turned out to be more beautiful than all the other maidens, and the king's choice fell on her, and she was presently installed in the palace. It was not known to the king and the public that she was of Hebrew blood.

But God knew it, and he put her in that palace for a purpose.

2. An Offended Official.

The next chapter in the story opens with the appearance on the scene of one Haman, who is described as an Agagite, a name that probably indicates that he was of barbarian origin.

He became a favorite of the capricious king and was rapidly advanced in place and power until he was above all the princes. All the king's servants did him Oriental obeisance. Haman waxed fat and proud as he fed on the emoluments and honors of his great place, and as he walked through the king's gate he looked down with a high and haughty air upon the servants that obsequiously bowed low before him.

So all the king's servants prostrated themselves before Haman, "but Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence." Only one exception to the universal obeisance of the servants, but that one was enough; enough to wound Haman's sensitive and swollen pride and make him hot with rage; enough to spoil all the

satisfaction of his place and honors; there could be no peace for him as long as that one hated Jew did not bend his knee and cringe before him.

Human pride nearly always has this fly in its ointment. Though one may reach his ambition in wealth or in office or in fame, yet there will be something wanting that will spoil it all.

3. A Wicked Plot

Haman now laid a wide and deep and most wicked plot against the Jews. On a given day they were to be exterminated root and branch, old and young. Lots were cast to determine the most auspicious day for the terrible deed. The lot fell on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month.

It was now necessary to get the consent of the king to the plan, and Haman came before him with a plausible speech. He described the Jews in telling terms. They were a dispersed or separated race that refused to mingle with the people of the provinces; they were a peculiar people whose customs were alien and repellent; they were a disloyal people who kept not the king's laws; therefore it was not "for the king's profit to suffer them."

Then the wily Agagite unfolded his plan and made a bold bid for the king's support. Why should the king tolerate such a people? Let it be written that they should be destroyed, and Haman will guarantee that the business will bring into the royal treasury ten thousand talents of silver, an enormous sum variously estimated at from ten to twenty millions of dollars.

The speech took effect and, the king having granted Haman's request and handed him his signet ring, letters were hastily written and presently foam-flecked horses were racing along every road out from Shushan to every part of the empire, bearing authority and commands "to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, and to take the spoil of them for prey." Having done this, "the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed."

Well might it be, for when such things are done the troubled city should not be able to sleep, and the lightnings of heaven will surely begin to flash and strike.

4. A Queen's Dangerous Venture

Then there went up from every province of the empire a great cry of consternation and agony, such as went up from Egypt on the night when all the

first-born were slain. Mordecai rent his garments and put on sackcloth and ashes and walked through the city, uttering a loud and bitter cry, and stood before the king's gate.

The dreadful news quickly penetrated the palace, and the young Jewish queen was troubled. She sent to Mordecai to inquire the meaning of the terrible matter, and received from him a statement of the affair with a message that she should go in before the king and plead for the life of her people.

The queen replied that she was forbidden by law to enter the inner court and that she would go in at the peril of her life. Mordecai sternly answered that if she did not go in she would perish with her father's house; and was she not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

This demand put the poor queen in a hard situation. But the dauntless bravery that has ever slept in Hebrew blood and asserted itself in sublime heroism in great crises flashed its fire upon her cheek and she uttered the immortal words, "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

On the third day she stood in the inner court of the palace where she could be seen by the king, and his outstreched golden scepter was the royal signal that she was granted grace in his sight. In answer to the king's question as to what she would have, she requested that he and Haman would attend a banquet she had prepared.

Succeeding chapters of the story tell how Haman went home from the first banquet in exultation at the honor he had received from the queen, how that night the king was sleepless and heard read from the book in which were recorded the events of his reign that Mordecai had once saved his life and ordered that he should be honored, how the next day Haman had to carry out this hateful order, how at a second banquet Haman was denounced by the queen and was ordered off by the king to be hung on the very gallows he had erected for Mordecai, how the queen obtained from the king a decree that the Jews should be permitted to defend themselves, and how they thus triumphed over their enemies.

Perhaps the one definitely religious act referred to in the whole book is the fasting observed by the Jews and by Esther and her companions before she went in before the king, for fasting in the Old Testament was employed as a sign and means of expressing mourning with the object of averting divine wrath or supplicating the divine favor in times of trial.

The young queen together with her people thus engaged in prayer in preparation for this act of service and possible sacrifice which

she was about to perform. And it is evident that she and her people through this whole trying affair were pervaded and upheld by a beautiful spirit of piety.

5. Radiant Service

Esther's character is radiant with heroic obedience to duty and service and sacrifice. She was virtually the first woman of the world in her day, surrounded with wealth and luxury, a child of fortune, the envy of the empire. How strong was her temptation to become a mere creature of fashion and pleasure and flit as a gay butterfly in the giddy world of the court.

Yet this Jewish girl, when duty and danger called, turned from all these royal attractions and set her face towards the cross of service and possible mortal sacrifice.

Woman has a wonderful power in all her feminine gifts and in her peculiar ability and opportunity for service, and never is anyone more recreant to a great trust and a high call than when she turns into the mere primrose path of wealth and pleasure, fashion and folly, and never are her graces so charming and beautiful as when they are devoted to the service of humanity and poured out as a precious ointment on Christ.

The life of the very Son of God reached its climax of worth and nobility and glory on the cross, and sacrificial service has ever been the cross that has been laid on every worthy follower of his.

This cross assumes various forms and shapes, but it calls to every one as both a duty and a privilege, and our human life comes to its most glorious hour when we can say, "I go, and if I perish, I perish."

LESSON VIII.—AUGUST 20

THE SECOND RETURN FROM EXILE

Religious Teachers: A Need and an Opportunity

Golden Text: The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him. Ezra, 8:22.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 107:1–9.

Reference Reading: Ezra, 9:1–10:17.

Lesson Text: Ezra, 7:10; 8:21–23, 31–32

10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

21 ¶ Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.
22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God *is* upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath *is* against all them that forsake him.
23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us.

31 ¶ Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth *day* of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.
32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Ezra the Scribe.
2. A Fast at the River.
3. No Favors Asked.
4. Good Business.
5. Reform at Jerusalem.

The present lesson introduces us to Jewish history in the year 458 B. C., seventy-eight years after the return of the first caravan of captives from Babylon to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel.

Things had not prospered at Jerusalem, but had gone from discouragement to degeneracy. The building of the temple had been obstructed for fifteen

years, and even yet the sacred edifice was in an incomplete and unsightly condition. The colony had not attracted the dispersed Jews and grown into a large and powerful city, as had been hoped, but had remained small and poor and feeble.

The policy of exclusion that had shut out the Samaritans and aimed at inclosing the Jews in an impervious compartment had seemingly failed, and the pressure against it had grown so strong that it was relaxed and finally broken down.

Intermarriage with the surrounding heathen was the break in the protective dike through which the sea of worldliness found entrance. The flood came pouring through until Jerusalem was full of mixed and plural marriages.

Few things are more fatal to family religion and public morals than lack of affinity and looseness in the marital relation, and Jerusalem was again becoming degenerate and corrupt.

1. Ezra the Scribe

At this point in the history Ezra appears. He was a priest who is described as "a ready scribe in the law of Moses," who "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."

Evidently he was just the man for the hour. When there has been a falling away in religion and morality what is needed is a man that has prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach statutes and judgments.

Law is the only corrective for laxity, and judgments for degeneracy. When we have lapsed and gone astray the only hope for us is in seeking the Lord, and the law of Moses still contains the judgments we need.

Reports of the state of affairs in Jerusalem doubtless oppressed this good man, and he resolved upon a work of reformation. He began by appealing to king Artaxerxes for authority and means to go.

Heavenly visions must have earthly agencies for their fulfillment and the successful servant of the Lord must know how to seize the hand of man.

The great king granted the priest all his request. The Jews were already rising into power in Babylon and in all the great cities of the world, and kings

and potentates were finding it expedient to pay some attention to their desires and interests.

Artaxerxes wrote a letter or commission for Ezra that gave him large authority and means. He was to go to Jerusalem as governor-general with power to inquire into the civil and religious condition of the Jewish community and reform it "according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand."

All the people of Israel in the king's realm who desired to emigrate to Jerusalem were given permission to go. Large sums of money were also furnished Ezra with power to draw on the king's treasury without limit.

The king left no means unprovided and ordered that "whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven." With these large powers and provisions Ezra set about his work.

2. A Fast at the River

About fifteen hundred Jews assembled at the river Ahava to start on the expedition. On looking over the company Ezra found that there were no Levites among them to serve in the temple, and dispatched priests to secure them; and the total number of the caravan was thus raised to about seventeen hundred and fifty.

All things now seemed ready, and yet the caravan did not start. Why? Because all things may seem to be ready, and yet something very vital to success may be lacking. The outward preparations of men and money, of every material provision, may be complete, but how about the inward preparation of mind and heart?

Is faith firm and foresight clear? Is the heart teachable and trustful and the will resolute and strong? These are vital questions that should be considered by those that are setting out on a responsible enterprise.

Ezra would make sure of this inward preparation, and so he "proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."

A fast is a religious exercise that our forefathers found serviceable, and that we still might find useful.

It reduces the body to its lowest terms in order that the soul may reach unhindered its highest state; it depresses the physical life that it may intensify the spiritual life in deeper meditation and more searching self-examination and fuller and finer communion with God. The material is so masterful in our modern life that we need at times to escape from its pressure and live in the spirit.

Ezra had the people fast that they might humble themselves before God. Is not this one of our great needs? How can the proud that fear not God nor regard man tread the sure way of safety and success? They are blinded by their pride and shall go stumbling to their fall.

3. No Favors Asked

Why did not Ezra ask the king for an armed escort of soldiers to guard the caravan on its long and dangerous journey? It carried rich treasure and must travel upwards of a thousand miles through regions infested with robbers: was it not prudence to have protection? When Ezra could draw upon the king for means without limit, why did he not ask for a guard?

Because he was ashamed to do so. He had told the king that the hand of their God was upon them for good, and would he now show that he had no faith in such protection by asking for the king's soldiers and horsemen? This argument would not always hold good, but it spurred Ezra to heroic trust. There is a lesson in this reserve of this ancient priest.

The church may draw upon the resources of the world and of worldly men for many things, but there are limits beyond which it should not go. It should beware of asking favors of worldly men and of resorting to worldly means to accomplish its ends; and it should never use any means or take any attitude that implies any lack of faith in God and in the power of his own appointed means. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God."

4. Good Business

One other thing Ezra did before the caravan started. He took the silver and gold and precious vessels, had them carefully weighed and their value accurately determined and recorded, and then handed all the treasure over to twelve of the chief priests and ten other selected men. Besides the sacred

vessels of gold there were a hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver vessels of a hundred talents, and a hundred talents of gold, the worth of the whole being between four and five millions of dollars (verses 24–30).

Ezra then charged the treasure-keepers, "Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and the chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord."

This was good business, good morals and good religion on the part of Ezra. All this treasure had been committed by the king and people to him, yet he would not administer it secretly as a private trust, but committed it to other hands and had it all checked up and insisted on accurate bookkeeping and the fullest publicity.

This is the method that should govern all financial transactions in the church and out of it. The private administration of public funds, looseness in accounts, and secrecy are dangerous methods that lead to suspicion and may lead on to dishonesty and crime.

There is always need of business in religion as well as of religion in business, and the pastor especially should keep his hands out of the treasury and let other men attend to this business.

5. Reform at Jerusalem

Then the caravan departed and soon stretched its long line of marching men and women and children and burdened camels along the road towards Jerusalem. The good hand of God was upon them, and in due time they reached the sacred city.

What was Ezra's chief work there? He saw how the law of Moses, which had been his life-study and which he had especially come to enforce, was being violated in Jerusalem, the city in which above all other places on earth it should have been honored and obeyed.

He saw that the root of the existing degeneracy were the heathen marriages that had corrupted the Jews. He therefore called upon the Israelites to put away their heathen wives and sternly executed this decree.

Our foreign missionaries are often confronted with the same hard situation and have to carry out the same policy, though sometimes they try to soften its asperity.

Ezra thus cleansed Jerusalem from this pollution and saved the chosen people from being merged and lost in the heathen world. He is charged with

being the father of that system of unyielding and mechanical legalism that grew and hardened into the dry and empty husks of Pharisaism. It is true that he was a scribe of somewhat narrow and unbending principles and practices that did issue in the Pharisaic formalities of later times.

Yet Ezra was right, as the Pilgrims and Puritans were right, whose principles and spirit we have been recently honoring. Ezra lived at a time when the people of Israel that had been chosen and trained for a special purpose were in danger of defeating that purpose by being dissolved in the surrounding sea of heathen worldliness and vice; and he erected around them the law of Moses and made it exclusive and stiff and unyielding only that it might protect and keep them as a peculiar people that thus they might be saved themselves and might become the salt of the whole earth.

The wheat is enclosed in the field, not to keep it from the people, but to protect it from weeds that would smother it until it can ripen and then be distributed among the people.

The Jews were the wheatfield of the ancient world, and they were surrounded with a fence that they might ripen the grain that is now furnishing the world with the bread of life.

A great religious teacher saw this point and instituted this reform, and never was the world in greater need of religious teachers and statesmen than it is to-day.

Only Christian education can raise a bulwark against anarchy and Bolshevism and suppress crime and train up a generation of people that will keep the law of the Lord, in keeping of which there is great individual and social and national and international prosperity and peace.

LESSON IX.—AUGUST 27

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

Prayer and Power

Golden Text: The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. James, 5:16.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 42:1–8.

Reference Material: Ex. 32:20–32; I Sam. 7:5–11; I Kings, 8:22–55; Jer. 14:19; 22; Matt. 9:37–38; Luke, 6:12–16; Acts, 1:12–14; Eph. 3:14–21.

Lesson Text: Nehemiah, 1:1–11

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace,
2 That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and *certain* men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.
3 And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province *are* in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also *is* broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.
4 ¶ And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,
5 And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:
6 Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.
7 We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.
8 Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, *If* ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:
9 But *if* ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, *yet* will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.
10 Now these *are* thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.
11 O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. *Nehemiah a Man of Piety and Prayer.*
2. *An Inquiry Concerning His Own People.*
3. *A Discouraging Report.*
4. *Sympathy Expressing Itself in Service.*
5. *Fasting and Prayer.*
6. *A Scriptural Prayer.*

Ezra carried through his stern reforms with a firm hand, but still Jerusalem did not prosper. Things continued to go from bad to worse, and in this lesson we witness the beginning of another effort to turn the tide and restore the holy city.

1. Nehemiah a Man of Piety and Prayer

The story opens with a new figure in the foreground. Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah steps into view. Nothing is known of him beyond what is disclosed in this narrative. He was a captive Jew in Shushan who was born in captivity and therefore had never seen Jerusalem.

He tells us that he was cupbearer to the king. A cupbearer was far from being a menial servant, but was really a favorite and counsellor at court, a confidential minister of state. We also gather from chapter 5:16–18 that Nehemiah was a man of large private wealth, which he may have inherited or may have gained through his position.

He was a man of great ability and indomitable will; and above all, he was a man of piety and prayer, of inflexible faith and heroic faithfulness.

Here is another captive Jew who has risen to a high position in a foreign court and is yet true to his fathers' God and to his own beloved land.

2. An Inquiry Concerning His Own People

One day about thirteen years after Ezra went up to Jerusalem Nehemiah met certain men of Judah, one of whom, Hanani, is called his brother (7:2). "I asked them," he says, "concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem."

This question is a revelation of the kind of man Nehemiah was. In his high position at court and with his wealth, invested with distinction and influence

and surrounded with comfort and luxury, he did not forget his poor oppressed kinsmen and was not ashamed to call them brethren. How easy it would have been for him to have urged that the onerous duties of his great place released him from obligation to inquire into the condition of his own people!

What a wide and impassable chasm do wealth and power and pride often put between a fortunate favorite and the humble people and needy kinsmen from whom he has risen!

But Nehemiah was not made of such false and fickle stuff. His principles did not change with his position, and his comforts could not keep him from being sorely conscious of his suffering kindred. So he embraced this opportunity to inquire concerning the Jews that had escaped from captivity and concerning Jerusalem.

Inquiry into the condition of others is often the first step towards helping them. What is the reason we are often so indifferent towards the needs and distresses of others that have a claim upon our interest and help? Partly because we are so absorbed in our own affairs and partly because we are ignorant of their condition. If we would take the time and trouble to find out how others are living and what are their needs, we would surely be moved to give them a helping hand.

One reason we are so little interested in the progress of the kingdom of God in the world is that we know so little about the condition of the heathen and the needs of the work.

3. A Discouraging Report

The returning brethren had a discouraging report to make of the state of affairs in Jerusalem. The remnant of the captivity there was in great affliction and reproach, the wall was broken down, and the gates were burned with fire. The walls had been partially rebuilt, but when the work had been stopped by the interference of the neighboring races at court these enemies had attacked the city and destroyed the walls and burnt the gates.

There have been times in the history of the church when it was in a similar condition; and there are times in our social order when the walls and gates of law and safety are broken or are threatened with the axes and fire of revolution and anarchy; and the same invasion of disruptive forces may occur in our individual lives.

This sad recital overcame Nehemiah and he sat down and wept. His

heart ached for Jerusalem, imagination pictured the sorrows of his people, sympathy boiled up out of his affections, hot tears flooded his eyes and the strong man gave way and wept like a child.

Here was a rich man in a high station who cared for something more than his own comfort; his heart was true and tender towards his own despised and suffering kinsmen, and he suffered with them. How are we affected towards those in distress? Do we ever see our brother in need and shut up our compassion from him? Are we moved to tears over the condition of the church and city and country and world? or over our own spiritual state?

What we cry over is as deep a test of character as what we laugh about, and both may reveal the inmost spirit of our hearts. Over this same Jerusalem Jesus wept in later days, and never was he more truly Son of Man and Son of God than when he broke down and sobbed over this city.

When we are moved to weep over the condition of others and of ourselves we are strong to help them and are nigh to deliverance.

4. Sympathy Expressing Itself in Service

What did Nehemiah do about this matter?

It is important to note that he did do something. He did not simply let his emotions flow off in his tears and his tears evaporate into empty air; he did not think that a good cry over Jerusalem excused him from action or did the desolate city any good. No, he directed his emotions as a stream of energy upon his will and thereby set in operation a long train of action; he turned his feelings into fact, his sympathy into service, his tears into toil, and his sorrow into salvation.

Feeling that simply stirs the soul and then is allowed to pass off without expressing itself in action, not only does no good to others, but does harm to the soul itself; it dries up the sensibilities and renders them less susceptible of feeling the next time. One may thus waste away all his sensitiveness to the need of others and wither his own heart into dust or harden it into stone.

We are apt to suppose that if we have felt sorry for another and especially if we have wept over him that we have shown our virtue and done him a service, whereas we may have done nothing of the kind. Such emotion may

be only a sentimental indulgence or even luxury. Some people like to cry, especially if it does not cost them anything. We must first feel and then we must turn the stream of feeling upon the will and cause it to issue in practical deeds.

It ought to be a rule of our lives to follow every good feeling with a good act. It is a dangerous practice and habit to be stirred with virtuous feeling and then let it evaporate in inaction.

Professor James in his Psychology says that this is the danger of excessive novel reading and theater going: they play upon the emotions without giving the will anything to do; and such wasted emotions, he says, may turn one into a perfect monster of insensibility and cruelty.

Every misspent emotion is a sin. Such waste impoverishes the emotional nature and weakens the will. Let us cultivate the power of deep and tender feeling, but let us use this feeling as vital energy to move us to action.

5. Fasting and Prayer

What action did Nehemiah take? He fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

To the worldly mind this might seem to be doing less than nothing. Why did he not do something practically helpful? Why did he not use the power of his high position to get authority and means from the king, as Ezra did, to restore Jerusalem? Why look up into the sky and not down upon the earth?

Because our greatest energies come down out of the sky and not up out of the earth.

Whence come our light and heat and all the energy that makes our harvests grow and turns all the wheels in our factories and sends our locomotives speeding across the continent and our steamships plowing through the seas and our airships flying through the air? Not up out of the earth, but down out of the sky, whence come all our light and heat, including the very coal and oil and gas out of the earth.

The sun is the central power-house that runs our planet, and we can only turn our wheels by hitching them to its great golden driving wheel. So also does spiritual power come down out of heaven.

Prayer first with one hand grasps the hand of God that then with the other hand it may seize and move the world. Nehemiah first went straight to the

central fountain of all power that he might be endued with wisdom and might for the deliverance of his people.

The shortest path to all holy ends runs hard by the throne of God. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts," and prayer is the vital artery that connects us with the divine Spirit and thereby makes us the channels and instruments of his will.

6. A Scriptural Prayer

Nehemiah's intercession for his people is a model of true prayer. It has on it all the marks of right supplication.

It is noteworthy for the Scriptural language in which it is expressed. While it contains no direct quotations, yet it is woven of phrases taken from Deuteronomy and Kings and it is saturated with the spirit of Moses and the prophets.

We should so feed upon the Word of God that its inspired language will give point and power to our prayers. We thus link our petitions with all the prayers of these holy men, and then they pray with us, and the ages are reënforcing our supplications. We thus call to our help the mighty cloud of witnesses that surround us.

The first note in this prayer is confession. Nehemiah goes straight to the root of Israel's troubles in its sin. He is sorely conscious of this unfaithfulness and corruption and pours out his soul in a full and free confesssion. And he does not confine his contrition to the sin of the nation, but grows definite and personal and specifies himself: "both I and my father's house have sinned."

When one prays in this spirit he is getting close to the throne of grace and power.

Then he pleads the promises. He would have God "remember," and quotes to him his own covenant and beseeches him to fulfill it.

The promises of God are his hands by which we may grasp him, and we should lay hold of them with all our might.

At last Nehemiah is ready for his definite petition for aid, and he asks that God will prosper him and "grant him mercy in the sight of this man." "This

man" was the king whose cupbearer he was. Now the prayer is coming down to earth and laying hold of human means and getting ready for practical action.

After all, prayer is not simply an upward look, but it also looks downward and taxes heaven and earth to fulfill its purposes. Such prayer cannot be in vain, and we shall surely see it issue in great results.

LESSON X.—SEPTEMBER 3

NEHEMIAH REBUILDS THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM

Success Through Leadership and Coöperation

Golden Text: Our God shall fight for us. Neh. 4:20.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 48:1–2, 9–14.

Reference Material: Neh. 2:9–20; I Cor. 3:9–17.

Lesson Text: Nehemiah, 4:7–16

7 ¶ But it came to pass, *that* when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, *and* that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth,
8 And conspired all of them together to come *and* to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.
9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.
10 And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and *there is* much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.
11 And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.
12 And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us *they will be upon you.*
13 ¶ Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, *and* on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.
14 And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, *which is* great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.
15 And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.
16 And it came to pass from that time forth, *that* the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers *were* behind all the house of Judah.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. Renewed Opposition.

2. Still Praying.

3. Setting a Watch.

4. Internal Discouragement.

5. The Courage of Faith.

6. Ready for Work or War.

Having uttered his great prayer, Nehemiah waited and watched for a fitting opportunity to put it into action. The opportunity soon came; it always does come to those who, having first prayed, then wait and watch for it.

While serving as cupbearer, Nehemiah's sad countenance led the king to inquire of him the cause of his sorrow, and this opened the way for him to set forth the condition of his city and to ask that he might be sent to rebuild it. The request was granted, and this pious patriot was soon in Jerusalem clothed with the power for action.

A night visit around the walls of the city disclosed the situation and enabled him to prepare and propose plans. The priests and people responded, "Let us rise up and build." The work was parceled out among forty-four groups or gangs of workmen, and the walls, having been begun about the first of July, B. C. 444, were finished in September of the same year.

Here is what one man of prayer and purpose, fire and force, can do.

Nehemiah brought no new men to Jerusalem, but putting spirit and speed into the men that were there he so organized and energized them that they were able to do what they thought could not be done.

1. Renewed Opposition

The rebuilding of the city again encountered opposition. Sanballat and Tobiah, the Arabians and Ammonites and the Ashdodites, surrounding heathen people, when they saw the walls going up and the breaches stopped were wroth and conspired together to fight against Jerusalem and hinder the work.

They feared that if the city were restored they would lose their power of petty tyranny and be reduced to subjection. All the forces of political despotism and religious rancor were organized and let loose against the project. Jerusalem could be rebuilt only at the cost of battle.

It always has been so and is so to-day. The forces of evil have never been so suppressed and supplanted that they remain quiescent in the front of advancing good.

The building of the kingdom of God on earth is a mighty battle that has convulsed all the ages and is still raging.

There is everywhere a powerful conspiracy of unbelief and worldliness and vice to prevent the walls of this kingdom from rising and their breaches from

being closed. And the same opposition beats against the kingdom as it rises in the individual soul.

2. Still Praying

What did Nehemiah and his workers do in the face of this formidable conspiracy and opposition? Drop the work in fear and discouragement and slip back into cowardly indifference and neglect? No, the man that prayed so earnestly in Shushan and came all the way to Jerusalem to carry out his prayer could not be guilty of such weakness and shame.

"Nevertheless"—there is saving grace in that "nevertheless," already it sounds forth the note of victory. What we need is that spinal stiffness and stanchness that can face the most trying opposition and nevertheless not sink down or sink back, but stand up and go forward.

Temptation and trial should make us true to our duty and task never the less but always the more.

"Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God." Still praying was this man Nehemiah. One would have thought that by this time he would have lost faith in prayer. He had been praying for many months, and what had prayer done for him but led him into an ambuscade of conspiracy that was about to break loose upon him in deadly hate? Why not stop praying and do something practical?

Because praying is something "practical." What can be more practical in entering upon an undertaking than first to clasp hands with God who has all power in heaven and on earth?

3. Setting a Watch

Nehemiah, however, did not stop with praying. "We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them."

The vision of prayer that opened his eyes to see God did not make him less keen and vigilant in watching men. He did not expect that the breath of his prayer would blow his enemies away, but he rose from his knees to throw himself with all his might into defensive action. Pray, and then set a watch! was Nehemiah's rule.

Cromwell's rule was framed on the same principle: "Trust God and keep your powder dry." On the same principle Dr. Chalmers said that we should pray as though all depended on God and then work as though all depended on man.

It thus appears that prayer is no easy road or short cut to our ends, but is only preparation and power for action. It is not a way in which we get God to do our work for us; rather, it is a way in which God gets us to do his work for him.

The true nature of prayer is expressed in James 5:16, which has been translated, "The prayer of a righteous man is of great force when energized." The point is plain.

We must energize our prayers.

Uttered as mere pious wishes, they may be only so much empty breath and troubled air; but when we put into them our energies, turning our wish into work, such prayer is "of great force."

Prayer, then, is girding up our loins for the burden; it is a call to battle, a way of coworking with God. Instead of releasing us from our duty and work, it sends us right back to our task to enter into it with renewed consecration and intensified energy. The difference prayer makes is that after we have offered it we know and feel that God is working for us and in us, and if God be for us who can be against us?

"Watch and pray," is the Master's own injunction, and either without the other is only half our duty and it takes both to make the full-orbed prayer of power.

4. Internal Discouragement

Opposition from without was not the only discouragement that the workers encountered; resistance also sprung up from within. "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall."

Such words from the men of Judah, the very Jews in Jerusalem, must have fallen heavily and sorely on the heart of Nehemiah after he had come so far to help them.

The Jews that dwelt on the borders of the enemies also came to Jerusalem and offered discouraging advice. These faint-hearted and frightened Jews pleaded that they had been exhausted by toil and hardship, pointed to the piles of rubbish, and declared that they were not able to carry on the job. As the walls rose higher and the work grew harder, the novelty of the enterprise

wore off, and the threatening attitude of the enemies at length overcame the courage of some and they wanted to throw down their tools and quit.

It is hard enough to meet the opposition of open enemies; it is harder still to withstand the discouraging attitude and obstruction or the cowardice of friends. The kingdom of God as it is represented in the church is divided and disturbed with no little degree of this internal trouble.

The divisions of the church sometimes set it against itself and thus distract and weaken it. The local congregation and our individual work are often discouraged in the same way. The kingdom of God and the church call for coöperation, and we should all join together in this work.

5. The Courage of Faith

Nehemiah now took decisive measures to meet the enemy and inspire the people. Behind the walls he arrayed men armed with swords and spears and bows so stationed that they could be seen by the enemies on the outside.

Then he delivered an inspiring pious and patriotic speech to the nobles and rulers and rest of the people. "Be not afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible": here is the courage of faith.

Nehemiah first turned the people towards the enemies that looked so formidable and filled them with fear, and then he turned them to the Lord and bade them remember how great and terrible he is. One who has seen the face of God as his friend need never more fear the face of man as his enemy.

Then Nehemiah urged the people to "fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses." Here he touched all the chords of patriotism and smote them into passion. Houses, sons, daughters, wives, what can so deeply appeal to us and so powerfully move us into action? Here the man of prayer becomes a master of statesmanship and marshals all forces, spiritual and material, for the defense of his country.

He who prays most earnestly may also prepare for conflict most vigorously and fight most victoriously. Religion does not make weak men, but men who are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

6. Ready for Work or War

When the enemies saw the glitter of steel behind the walls their warlike advance received a pause. Their plan of sudden surprise and overwhelming

attack was thwarted, their terrible threats turned out to be idle words, and they stayed at a respectful distance.

Having halted the advance of the enemies, what did Nehemiah and his workers now do? Sit still and watch Sanballat and Tobiah? No, "we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work."

It is a poor policy simply to watch enemies: we must do something positive and push forward our cause. Building the wall of righteousness is itself an efficient way of battling against evil.

Yet these Jews also deftly combined work and war. Half of them worked on the walls and the other half stood armed with spears and shields, and also "every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon." War could not keep them from work, and work could not keep them from being ready for war. They could lay a stone on the wall with a trowel or thrust an enemy through with a spear as duty required.

So ought we to be armed and prepared that we can at the same time build the city of God and beat back the attacks of the devil. Let us not be so intent on watching evil that we cannot do good, or so absorbed in doing good that we cannot watch evil, but be prepared for and engaged in both, brave in war and faithful in work.

Thus the inspiring leadership of one man reorganized the divided forces at Jerusalem and massed them into the real walls of Jerusalem, which then soon built the walls of stone.

Leadership is a prime requisite in every undertaking. The appearance of Napoleon on the field of battle was said to be equal to the arrival of fifty thousand fresh troops, and the appointment of Foch as the supreme commander of all the armies was the decisive turning point in the Great War.

We have a masterful Leader in the Captain of our salvation, and we should all unitedly follow him to victory.

LESSON XI.—SEPTEMBER 10

TEACHING THE LAW OF THE LORD

Coöperative Bible Study

Golden Text: Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Psalm, 119:33.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 119:97–105.

Reference Material: Deut. 6:4–9; II Chron. 15:8–15; 30; Acts, 17:1–9; 19–34; 19:8–20; Col. 1:9–11.

Lesson Text: Nehemiah, 8:1–3, 5–6, 8–12

And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that *was* before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

3 And he read therein before the street that *was* before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* unto the book of the law.

5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading.

9 ¶ And Nehemiah, which *is* the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day *is* holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

10 Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for *this* day *is* holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day *is* holy; neither be ye grieved.

12 And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. *The Law of the Lord Brought Forth.*
2. *A Great Community Bible Study.*
3. *The First Pulpit.*
4. *The Law Read Distinctly and Explained.*
5. *Sorrow and Joy.*

While the wall was going up there was a great cry raised by the poor against the rich because of profiteering and oppression in Jerusalem, showing us the ancient forms of modern abuses. The wealthier Jews were lending money to their poor brethren, charging them ruinous rates of interest and foreclosing mortgages on their land.

Nehemiah redressed this economic evil by restoring the lands and remitting the interest.

Sanballat and Tobiah also kept up their machinations. They tried to inveigle Nehemiah into a conference in a distant village, hoping to catch him and probably to assassinate him, but Nehemiah saw through their cunning and refused to walk into their trap. At length the wall was finished in fifty-two days, and then followed the event of this lesson.

1. The Law of the Lord Brought Forth

The important fact about a city is not the wall that is around it, but the kind of people that are within it. If a wall is only to shut in a nest of robbers or a pool of corruption, it were better not built. The wall around Jerusalem derived its value from the people safeguarded behind it. They were worth more to the world in that day than any other people on the earth.

The wall having been completed, all the inhabitants gathered themselves together as one man in the street, and called upon Ezra the scribe to bring the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.

This is the first mention of Ezra in this book, and it is supposed that he had been absent for a number of years engaged in compiling and editing the law of Moses. A unanimous demand from the people for the reading of the Word of God—what a promising sign was this of moral and spiritual health and coming blessing! These people were not so absorbed in material building that they had no thought for spiritual interests, they did not build that wall up between themselves and their worship.

Men in these days are often so devoted to the pursuit of money that they neglect and come to despise their higher welfare, they build up walls of wealth that shut out the blue sky and the face of God.

But when a people are hungering for the Word of God all their spiritual faculties are alive, and they shall receive life more abundant and blessed.

Ezra the scribe was ready with the law. When the demand for him came he was prepared, and every scribe and teacher of God's Word should be ready through such study and preparation as will enable him to meet his opportunities and fulfill the demands that are made upon him. Ezra brought the law before the congregation both of men and women and all that could hear with understanding. That was an ideal congregation.

2. A Great Community Bible Study

Ezra read the law before that great congregation of forty-two thousand, besides thousands of servants (7:66–67), and though probably all were not present yet they filled the public square before the water gate on the east side of the city and stood from morning till noon. Priests stood by Ezra's side and doubtless took turns at helping him.

It was a great community meeting for the study of the Bible. These people were not afraid of being wearied with worship and did not demand that the sermon be cut down to twenty or at the most to twenty-five minutes and that the whole service be not more than an hour long, but they went through and enjoyed a service that lasted from daylight until midday.

We have become so delicate and dilettante that we cannot endure the least weariness and snap our watches to warn the minister from running over the hour.

People that are so interested in the worship that they forget the clock and lose all sense of time get some bread out of the service that will develop robust spiritual life and last many days.

The interest in this service was shown in the fact that "the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law."

Attention is the secret of good hearing, and good hearing contributes inspiringly to good preaching; and no doubt one reason that

there is so much poor preaching up in the pulpit is that there is such lamentably poor hearing down in the pews.

The word attention means stretching the mind towards the subject being presented. Attention, then, is not a lazy languid state of mind, mere emptiness into which something is being poured, but it is an active and earnest effort to see and seize and assimilate the truth.

The truths of God's Word are so great and grand and vital and blessed that we should never sit passive under them and let them slip idly off our minds, but we should stretch all our faculties to grasp them and feed upon them.

3. The First Pulpit

The method by which the law was read is worth noting. Ezra stood upon a pulpit of wood. This is the first mention of the "pulpit" in history, and it marks the beginning of a new method and a new era.

This is the first time of which we have record in which the Word of God was preached from a pulpit. Hitherto the religion of Israel had been largely proclaimed through priest and prophet using sacrifice and symbol. The temple had grown up into a vast ritualistic system that invested worship in the gorgeous garb of ceremony.

This simple wooden pulpit dispensed with all symbols and addressed the people directly, reading to them the Word of God and explaining it in everyday speech.

The day Ezra set up that pulpit ritualistic worship appealing to the senses began to wane, and spiritual worship addressed directly to the reason and conscience began to increase. Henceforth the priest was to be less and less, and the preacher more and more.

That unadorned wooden pulpit looked pitifully plain and impotent as it stood under the shadow of the great temple, but it was destined to displace the temple and fill the whole earth. Ezra, narrow scribe as he was, was the first preacher and was the forerunner of Paul and Augustine and Luther, and his pulpit has become the throne of the Christian world.

The preacher, however, did not monopolize the whole service, but the people had a part, for when Ezra blessed the Lord the congregation answered, "Amen,

Amen," a good Methodist response that used to be frequently heard from the people, but we have grown so formal and "cultured" that it is now silenced in nearly all of our churches.

The pulpit should not do all the worshiping or all the speaking, but should leave something for the pew, and responsive reading gives the congregation a larger share in the service.

4. The Law Read Distinctly and Explained

The manner in which the law was read is instructive. "They read in the book in the law of God distinctly." No hurrying through the passage and slurring the syllables and mumbling and muttering the words and droning and chanting singsong monotones in an unintelligible voice; but the voice was natural and strong, each sound was distinctly enunciated, each syllable was sharp-cut and clean, every word fell from the lips of the reader as a newly-minted coin, or issued clear as the stroke of a bell, or rang out vibrant and strenuous as the blare of a trumpet, and every listener throughout that vast audience could hear with distinctness and ease. In this respect the first pulpit set a good example for all pulpits.

The way in which the Bible is read in some pulpits would be ludicrous were it not so painful to a practical mind and a reverent soul. What is the use of hurrying through and mumbling over and whining out a passage of Scripture, if it is not to be heard and understood? Better close the book than butcher it in cold blood.

Reading in a natural tone and distinct voice is a fine art that every one should cultivate, and nowhere is it more useful and beautiful than in the pulpit and in all reading of the Word of God.

Not only did they read the law distinctly, but they also "gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." The law of Moses was written in a language that had become somewhat antiquated and obsolete to these Babylonian and Persian Jews, and so it needed to be explained.

This is still the business of the scholar and preacher and teacher. We are to translate these ancient laws into modern speech so that

they will be living realities that will come home to every one's business and bosom.

The religion of the Bible is too often introduced to us as though it were a stranger and a foreigner in the world, speaking a language that we do not understand. We must dress it up in the garb of to-day and make it speak in our own tongue. Then we shall recognize it as a friend that will walk by our side and help us in all the affairs of life.

We must learn to translate these teachings into our own thought and feeling, carrying our consciousness back into the consciousness of these prophets and apostles. These words have the wonderful power of pouring their ideas into our minds and of reproducing the whole stage and scenery and life of that ancient time before our eyes. They are bridges uniting our minds with these inspired minds over which roll the commerce of their thoughts and aspirations into our hearts.

These words are bits of spiritual bread from other days that we can masticate and digest and assimilate so that they will pass into our blood and reappear in the strength and beauty and blessedness of our lives. Nothing is so useful and vital and invigorating as the law of the Lord when we are given its sense and made to read it with understanding.

5. Sorrow and Joy

What was the result of this reading and preaching from Ezra's pulpit? "All the people wept, when they heard the words of the law." This law convinced them of sin and righteousness and judgment to come, and they were seized with penitence that could express itself only in tears.

The reading may be ever so distinct and beautiful, it may charm every hearer with its mellifluous music, but if it brings conviction to no conscience, penitence to no heart, tears to no eyes, help to no soul, it is in vain. Reading and teaching and preaching the Bible is serious business that should prove its usefulness and efficiency by convicted and converted souls.

Nehemiah and Ezra, however, turned the people from their tears to joy and feasting. It was right that they should weep, but it was a feast time and the

law of Moses had some better news for them than mere conviction and judgment.

The Word of God begins with law that should work mighty conviction and bring forth tears, but it ends with wonderful grace, good tidings of great joy, that should dry all our tears and turn life into gladness, joy and song. Such were the results of this great community study of the Bible, and the book is still the power of God unto salvation.

LESSON XII.—SEPTEMBER 17

THE MESSAGE OF MALACHI

What the Bible Teaches About Giving

Golden Text: Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. Mal. 3:7.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 32:1–7.

Reference Material: II Kings, 17:7–23; Isa. 6; Jer. 1:7–10; Ezek. 2:6–7; Acts, 20: 35; I Cor. 16:1–2; II Cor. 8:1–9:15.

Lesson Text: Malachi, 3:7–18

7 ¶ Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept *them*. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?

8 ¶ Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

9 Ye *are* cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, *even* this whole nation.

10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall* not *be room* enough *to receive it*.

11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts.

12 And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.

13 ¶ Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken *so much* against thee?

14 Ye have said, It *is* vain to serve God: and what profit *is it* that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts?

15 And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, *they that* tempt God are even delivered.

16 ¶ Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard *it*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

18 Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Will a Man Rob God?
2. Grace for Gold.
3. Serving God for Pay.
4. Speaking One with Another.

Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and after his voice was hushed there was prophetic silence in Israel for four hundred years. Perhaps the explanation is that the Old Testament was now complete, and the Bible took the place of the prophet.

Malachi was probably a cotemporary of Nehemiah, and his preaching prepared the way for the reforms that Nehemiah wrought in Jerusalem. He opens his argument with the apostate people by setting forth the divine love for Israel: "I have loved you, saith the Lord." This is the starting-point of all the divine pleadings, the basis of all God's dealings with us.

Insensate Israel wanted to know wherein God had loved them and were pointed to neighboring nations for proof of mercy to them. This controversy between God and Israel runs through the book.

1. Will a Man Rob God?

The Lord grew very definite and pointed in his charges against Israel, naming sorcerers and adulterers and false swearers and profiteers and oppressors, and then he comes to another offense: "Will a man rob God?" Verily he has done so and will.

> Men that would not think of robbing one another will pursue conduct and develop character along lines that involve the robbery of the Most High. A man's whole life may be a robbery of God. What do we owe him? Do we not owe him all that we have and are, external property and internal power? And in so far as we use these so as to deprive him of their service and glory, we deny him his own and are robbers in his sight.

These unfaithful Jews again protested their ignorance of the meaning of the charges and received the pointed specification, "In tithes and offerings." This was a very coarse form of robbery, just so much money or produce that they were withholding from the Lord.

We have not forgotten how to withhold the tithes and offerings. It is true that we may not be bound down to a specified proportion in our giving, for we have graduated out of the system of rules that were appropriate to the childhood of the church and have been admitted into the large liberty and freer methods of the gospel. The tithe or rather a double tithe is the rule of the Old Testament, but the New Testament enjoins us on the first day of the week to lay by us in store as God hath prospered us.

Only the form of the old rule is changed, but its spirit remains and is expanded into the freer yet not less systematic new rule. Giving is still to be done according to system and not in a haphazard way. A certain part of our income is to be given to the Lord's work, and this part is to keep pace with our prosperity.

This proportion in many cases should be not less than a tenth and in some cases should be more. Here is a matter which Christian conscience must decide. Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind. But we should have a system, and in so far as we fall below our part and proportion we rob God.

2. Grace for Gold

The giving of the tithes is accompanied with a great promise: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Is there any such connection between material gifts and spiritual blessings that the offering of the one will certainly call down the other? Does God here coolly propose to sell his grace for gold? The thought is repellent to every mind having a right conception of God.

There is no mechanical or magical connection between the two. Gold cannot buy or compel grace, though it were piled up in mountain heaps, and God has no blessing to sell or bestow on any such terms. One might bring a fabulous offering into the church and carry no spiritual blessing out, but rather go out all the more blighted in his soul.

Yet there is a real and vital connection between the state of heart that gives its offerings unto the Lord and the coming of his grace. Such an offering is an expression of trust and thankfulness and obedience and service, of loyalty and of love, and these are the very conditions that are receptive of and call down the Holy Spirit in a plenitude of blessing.

A heart that refuses to give is a narrow heart, shut up against the presence of God; but a heart that is sympathetic and generous is a large and open heart that is sure to attract his gracious presence. The spirit that gives is the same spirit that receives, and the two work together and intensify each other; and so psychology not less than Scripture enjoins upon us the duty of giving as a condition of receiving.

Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

And so it is a law of the husbandry of the soul that loving men is a condition and way of loving God, and as we express our love to men by our gifts, by the same gifts do we express our love to God and thereby invite more of his grace. "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and running over, shall men and God give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

3. Serving God for Pay

The Israelites raised another point in their controversy with the Lord. They said: "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" They even went so far as to declare that the wicked are better off than the righteous.

These Jews were in a state of reaction and depression arising from the disappointment of their hopes. They had returned from exile to Jerusalem expecting to rebuild their city and enter upon a period of glorious national prosperity and power.

Only very meager success had attended their efforts. They remained poor and subject to much insult and oppression, while proud heathen Persia had built up a splendid throne, and even despised Samaria was more prosperous. The long strain had proved too much for their faith and it began to give way.

This was the less surprising as their faith had always fastened itself most firmly on material promises and hopes. They expected righteousness to pay and were eager to count up the profits. When these profits failed and they

found themselves still poor and oppressed, the theory of their faith broke down, and they began to complain that they were serving God for naught and that the wicked were better off.

This commercial theory of righteousness is very plausible and attractive: it looks so reasonable and right. We are all disposed to think that our righteousness should receive cash rewards, and when the day of payment is long delayed we begin to suspect that there is something wrong.

No doubt there ought to be and is a broad connection and correspondence between righteousness and reward: the best people as a class do get the best pay. But this connection cannot be insisted on in individual cases: the righteous man may be poor and poor because he is righteous, and the wicked man may be rich and rich because he is wicked.

True righteousness is an inner state of heart that does not depend on outer conditions and is careless of consequences. "Boy," said a slave dealer to a black boy on the auction block in a Southern city in the days of slavery, "if I buy you, will you be honest?" "Sir," said the boy, "I will be honest whether you buy me or not." Beneath the black skin of that slave boy beat a true heart of righteousness.

Righteousness that is righteous in order that it may be rich is mercenary in its motive and unworthy of the respect of man or the favor of God. We must choose and follow righteousness for its own sake, and then trust God and leave consequences with him.

4. Speaking One with Another

While some of the people were thus complaining against God, there were others of them that were in a different frame of mind and were finding consolation in other thoughts. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."

These humble pious souls trusted God in the midst of their trials and sufferings. They refused to measure the worth of inner righteousness by its outer rewards; and they spoke with one another on these matters of their faith; they spoke of them as they met by the way, or in business, or social inter-

course, or as they met at the temple for worship; they possibly held religious meetings for conference and prayer. They thus strengthened and comforted one another.

Talking with one another is an effective means of enlarging and clarifying our knowledge on any subject. Telling what we know helps us to know what we tell better: for it brings it out of obscurity that often lies around it in our minds and gives it definite outlines and sharp edges.

Teaching others is thus one of the most efficient ways of being taught ourselves. The teacher is generally the best scholar in his own class and is learning more than any other member of it.

When many confer together on a subject their ideas are greatly multiplied and deepened and enriched. Indeed, human conversation is the great university of the world, and a few cultivated friends talking together, it has been said, are the highest product and finest flower of our civilization.

This principle is especially fruitful in our religious life. As we take counsel together in these matters of faith and fellowship, we acquire broader and clearer views and are mutually strengthened in faith and fervency.

It is to be feared that we are growing too reticent in our spiritual life and are disposed to think that religion is a private matter to be hidden in our hearts. We need to take counsel together in private fellowship and in public meetings in order that our religious life may feed and grow on this common fund of faith and catch the contagion of other souls.

The Lord heard the conference of these pious souls and remembered it so that he could enrich them with his blessing. They that think upon the name of the Lord shall have a place in his remembrance, and this is a reward richer than all the material possessions of this world. And they shall be the Lord's in the day when he makes up his jewels.

The Lord has jewels: people are all not alike to him. He puts a distinction between them, picks his own out of the clay of earth, polishes them into the image of his Son, and will wear them as stars in his eternal crown of glory.

LESSON XIII.—SEPTEMBER 24

REVIEW: THE EXILE AND THE RESTORATION

Lessons from the Exile and Return

Golden Text: The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Psalm, 126:3.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 66:1–5, 16–20.

PLAN OF REVIEW

Introduction.
1. The Prophet Ezekiel.
2. The Prophet Daniel.
3. Return and Rebuilding.
4. Esther.
5. Teaching the Law of the Lord.
6. The Prophet Malachi.

The lessons of the Second Quarter traced the decline and fall of the kingdom of Judah and closed with the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in B. C. 586, Jeremiah being the last prophet in Jerusalem.

The lessons of the Third Quarter open with the captives down in Babylon and extend from B. C. 536 to B. C. 445, which marks the return of Nehemiah to Jerusalem to rebuild the city.

1. The Prophet Ezekiel

We find Ezekiel as the first prophet in Babylon, he having been carried away in the first captivity. He is lying upon his face before the Lord, which is a becoming attitude for us all, and yet he is also bidden to arise to his feet, for the Lord wants us to appreciate and respect our own dignity as his sons and to be in a position to go on any errand of service.

The prophet was fortunate in being sent to people of his own blood and speech, and this is an advantage we all have in our work. He was a man of imagination which the Lord used in conveying his messages to him, and God always uses our special gifts and education in revealing his will to us and assigning to us our mission.

A vision of wings and wheels kindled the imagination of Ezekiel and showed

him the Lord's work and will. It was an unwelcome mission on which he was sent in that his own people were unwilling to receive his message, but this did not stop or discourage him in his duty.

If we were always to insist on having pleasant work, we would often have nothing to do.

Ezekiel was sent as a watchman unto the house of Israel, and the watchman fills a large place in our life and often are we called to this service. The fact that was most deeply and solemnly impressed upon the prophet was that he was so bound up by racial and moral affiliations with Israel that he was responsible for their spiritual condition.

These ties of social solidarity and obligation are woven more closely all through our modern life into community welfare and even world unity, and this has enormously widened and deepened our social responsibility. "Am I my brother's keeper?" is now a question that faces us and forces itself upon us in connection with every human being.

2. The Prophet Daniel

Daniel was one of those Hebrew boys who were carried off into captivity and then rose to high position and power among their captors. Like Ezekiel, he also was a prophet of imagination which God used in conveying to him great visions that were to be transformed into great victories.

His ability to interpret dreams was the ladder on which he first rose to favor and power. The dream of the great image with head of gold and feet of iron mixed with clay symbolized successive empires which met their fate in the stone cut out of the mountain of God's omnipotence without hands that shivered them to pieces.

That stone is now doing its work and we are all engaged in the mission of displacing the kingdoms of this world with the kingdom of God's truth and love.

In the mysterious handwriting on the plastered wall of Belshazzar's palace Daniel read the fate of that king and his kingdom, and all kingdoms are weighed in the same balances of God and judged according to the same eternal principles of national law and life.

Our own nation is also in the balance, and only Christian truth and righteousness will save it from being found wanting.

The story of Daniel in the lions' den never loses its interest as it sets forth the saving worth and power of self-control, temperance and loyalty to duty and to God in the young.

The same trial of heroism comes in our day to our young people and they can win the same crown of victory.

3. Return and Rebuilding

Five out of the twelve lessons of the quarter relate to the return of the exile Jews to Jerusalem and their rebuilding of their temple and city. As there were successive waves of captivity, so were there several expeditions of emigrants back to their country and capital.

The first return took place under the leadership of Zerubbabel, who had the ability to organize men and lead them on the long journey to Jerusalem. The Jews in their exile never forgot or were never weaned away from their native country, but were homesick with passionate yearning for return.

In due time captivity had done its work and a new era opened as the hour struck when the captives were to go back home. Cyrus was now on the Babylonian throne and he was used of God to further this work. Volunteers were called for, the emigrants assembled, the sacred vessels were returned by Cyrus to the Jews, and the great enterprise was under way.

The first thing the returned exiles did in Jerusalem was to put the first thing first by beginning to build the temple, and they began the temple by first erecting the altar and starting the sacrifices so that their work and worship could go on together. Of course there were both optimists and pessimists present at that time, for they are present at every place and time, and we can be one or the other according to the way in which we look at things.

Against opposition the temple at length was ready for use, and its dedication was a great day in Israel.

Seventy-eight years later a second expedition set out for Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra the scribe. Things had not gone well in the sacred city, and the temple, though it had been dedicated, was yet incomplete, and morals had degenerated.

Ezra was a scribe with the conservative instincts of his class, but he was also a practical man who could lead an expedition and reform a colony. The emigrants were halted at a river until they were in a spiritual state of prepara-

tion, business matters were attended to, the money and precious vessels were put in charge of treasurers, and then the caravan started and in due time reached Jerusalem.

Mixed marriages with the heathen were a chief cause of corruption in the city, and Ezra sternly forbade these and required the Jews to put away their heathen wives. He saw a cancer in the body of the Jewish state and church and he ruthlessly cut it out as the only way to save the life of Israel.

Ezra was a Puritan, but we Americans know the virtue of the Pilgrims and the Puritans and thank God that they are our spiritual ancestors. If we are not wise and brave enough to lay the axe at the root of every tree of evil, our tree will have its heart eaten out of it and then it will fall, and great will be the fall of it.

Nehemiah next appears upon the scene as reformer and builder at Jerusalem. He was a man of notable piety and prayer, and as he was born in captivity he had never seen his country; but being in an official position at the Persian court he had influence with the king.

He received a discouraging report of the state of affairs at Jerusalem, and he turned his tears into toil and was soon in the city directing the work of rebuilding its walls. Opposition was still hindering this work, but he set a watch and armed the workmen so that with one hand they wrought with a tool and with the other held a weapon and thus combined work with war.

This whole process of rebuilding Jerusalem is paralleled in our work of rebuilding the world into the kingdom of God. The world is in ruins as Jerusalem was and we are sent to reconstruct its moral and spiritual order. Opposition hinders us at every point, but prayer guides and strengthens us in it, and we are to be good soldiers and fight the battle of faith that will surely overcome the world.

4. Esther

Esther is a dramatic story illustrating the play of human nature and revealing the web of the world as it is shot through with the threads of divine providence.

A monarch's madness when under the influence of intoxication is the first scene on the stage, and next we see a petty official swollen with the pride of place offended at a man of a hated race who had failed to render him the cringing obeisance he demanded. He then devised a wicked plot against the

Jews in which all the prejudice and hatred of race that are still poured out upon this people found intense and deadly expression.

A young queen's heroic bravery in running the risk of death itself in behalf of her people is the central fact and splendid climax of the tragedy, and it turned out to be the turning point of the plot and resulted in the salvation of the Jews and the destruction of their enemies.

God is not named in the book, but he is in the background as the Providence that rules and overrules it all.

The lesson calls upon us to consider the racial prejudice and hatred and persecution that are still the lot of the Jews in the world. Through all these centuries they have borne this bitter burden as they wander through the world and meet this unhappy reception and fate. Even in our own country there has been an uncalled for and unreasonable recrudescence of this prejudice.

As Christians and Americans and humanitarians we should oppose this wrong and cruel thing and stand for equal rights and brotherhood among all races and classes and conditions of men.

5. Teaching the Law of the Lord

The law of the Lord plays an important part in these lessons. The greatest community study of the Bible recorded in history was that which was held out in the streets in Jerusalem when the whole city was gathered in a vast concourse to hear the Word of God read and explained.

That day opened a new era and method in worship and Bible study, for the meeting was not held in the temple and the Bible was read from a pulpit without any ceremony, and so here worship passed from the ritualistic to a spiritual form.

Much emphasis should be laid on the fact that the book was read distinctly and explained, and this is still a prime virtue in the reading and teaching of the Bible.

The reading was attended with tears and shouts of joy, and there is plenty of teaching in the Bible to make us both weep and rejoice.

The law of the Lord is the foundation of our life in keeping of which there is great reward and the violation of which is surely death.

6. The Prophet Malachi

The last prophet of the Old Testament has a message for us. It relates first to the duty of giving, which is no incidental and unessential part of our religious worship and life but is one expression of its inmost spirit.

> **In giving our money we are giving our very blood minted into coin so that we are giving life itself. Such giving is a vital means of grace and will surely be accompanied with an outpouring of spiritual blessings, while drying up this fountain will shut the windows of heaven.**

Yet it would be a gross perversion of the duty of giving if we were to think that it is a way of buying God's blessing, and it is an equally crass error for us to think that God should pay us for our service.

> **Mutual conference in our religious life is a vital means of grace and we engage in this especially in the prayer meeting and Sunday school and other social services of the church. God polishes his own jewels in this process, and the faithful use of this mutual means will prepare us to shine as jewels in our Saviour's crown.**

INTRODUCTION TO THE FOURTH QUARTER

In the Fourth Quarter of our studies we step out of the shadows and morning twilight of the Old Testament into the rising of the Sun of Righteousness in the New.

Luke is our guide. He was a professional man and trained scholar and gives us the result of his systematic investigation of the facts and documents relating to the life of Jesus. He went about his work with the same spirit and methods as the modern scientific historian, and we have a peculiar sense of confidence in his book.

The lessons of the quarter are only selected scenes and sayings from the wonderful Life which is the Light of the world, but they give us an impressive picture of Jesus. We witness his birth and childhood, see him tempted in the wilderness, follow his work as Physician and Teacher and Missionary and Friend of sinners, witness miracles and hear parables, catch a portion of the Sermon on the Mount, see his behavior among friends and foes, and are given warnings and assurances of comfort.

These lessons come home to us with personal point and application as they fit into our lives and prepare us to go forth, as did the disciples, to do the same works that the Master did, only greater because we live in a greater and more receptive world.

The lessons are located at that fullness of time when all things had grown into readiness for the coming of Christ. Old Testament shadows have served their purpose in foreshadowing the substance and realities of the gospel. The picture language and symbols of the old dispensation of preparation are now to give way to living truth and grace.

And a wide and wonderful preparation has been made in the pagan world. Babylon and Egypt, the world empires of the Old Testament, have fallen into obscurity, weighed down and overthrown by their own iniquities, the glory of Greece has faded, and Rome fills the world out to its utmost known horizon with its empire, unifying it with its iron hand within its rigid ring and hushing it into universal peace in which the gospel could be heard and have free course over the earth.

Pagan faiths have also proved their futility to answer the deepest questions and longings of the human soul and are everywhere at this hour in the history of the world dying a slow and often a pathetic death. Thus the hand of God

in history had shaped all things into convergence upon the great event and pivotal point of the ages from which all events in our calendar are dated, the birth of Christ. Henceforth we write, not B. C., but A. D., in the year of our Lord.

It is a great privilege to study and then to teach such lessons as these. Let us first get a general view of the life of Jesus in its setting and in the course of its events, and then grasp the central points in each lesson so as to hold them vividly and vitally in our own minds; and then in a spirit of prayer and of our deep responsibility and privilege let us endeavor so to present them as to impress them upon and instill them into the minds and hearts of our scholars.

FOURTH QUARTER

Jesus the World's Saviour: Studies in Luke.

LESSON I.—OCTOBER 1

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

The Place and Work of John the Baptist

Golden Text: He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. Luke, 1:15.

Devotional Reading: Luke, 1:68–79.

Reference Material: Isa. 40:3–5; Mal. 4:4–6.

Lesson Text: Luke, 1:8–22

8 And it came to pass, that, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,
9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.
10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.
11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.
12 And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.
13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.
14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.
15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.
16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.
17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.
18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.
19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.
20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.
21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple.
22 And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *Pious Ancestry.*
2. *An Angel Visitant.*
3. *A Joyous Announcement.*
4. *True Greatness.*
5. *A Worthy Work.*

With the last quarter of the year we pass from the Old Testament to the New and again begin the study of the Life of all lives the most important that was ever lived on this earth.

Luke is to be our authority and guide. He was of non-Jewish descent and formed the solitary instance in which the mantle of inspiration was carried outside of the chosen people and thrown around one of Gentile birth. He was the traveling companion and biographer of Paul and wrote under his influence, so that in some degree his Gospel has behind it the authority of the great apostle.

Luke was also a member of the medical profession so that he was a scholar and wrote with a scholar's sense of responsibility in ascertaining facts through investigation and stating them with accuracy as we see in his notable Preface to his Gospel.

1. Pious Ancestry

Luke starts his narrative in the days of Herod, the king of Judea. Herod was a monster of iniquity, and his reign marked the very darkest hour in the later history of the Jews. Yet in these terrible days the fullness of time arrived and Christ was born, as out of the foulness of stagnant waters comes the snowy blossom of the pond lily and shines as a white star on the bosom of the black waste. When things are at their worst healing forces may develop a pure life.

Luke begins the life of Jesus with John, his forerunner, and he begins the life of John with his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth. Every life has deep roots, and heredity is a tremendous factor in human character. To account for and understand a man we must know his parentage and ancestry. When we see John's parents we are not surprised at John himself.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. It would be hard to condense character into a more perfect crystal and to pronounce a finer eulogy. They were both compacted of righteousness, which is the foundation and sub-

stance and highest attainment of character; and their righteousness was not simply human morality and respectability, but it grew out of a divine core and stood the test of God's judgment.

They kept the commandments, or the moral law, and they observed the ordinances, or ceremonial law: they had both the inner spirit and the outer form of righteousness.

Yet there was a great void in these blameless lives, for no child had come to bless them with its innocence and beauty and joy, and to give them a share in the Messianic hope.

The fullest and most perfect life is incomplete at some point and has its disappointed hopes, and we shall never be satisfied until we " awake with thy likeness."

2. An Angel Visitant

Disappointment, however, did not sour and embitter the aged Zacharias, but he kept right on faithfully at his work as a priest in the temple service, and this kept his heart young and his life sweet; and it was in and through this service that a great and unexpected blessing came.

The priests were divided into twenty-four courses (I Chron. 23), and each course served in turn a week at a time. Every morning the various parts in the temple service were distributed among the priests by lot.

On this day the lot fell to Zacharias to enter the Holy Place and offer the burnt incense, which was the most sacred distinction that could fall to a priest and could come to him only once in his lifetime. At the tinkling of the bell that announced the hour of sacrifice, Zacharias, robed in white and with covered head and bared feet, stepped into the Holy Place and stood in the dim light of the seven-branched candlestick before the veil of Babylonian tapestry, woven of blue and scarlet and purple into a fabric of matchless beauty, that shut in the Holy of Holies where God dwelt "in the thick darkness."

Live coals were placed on the altar, the assistant priest retired, and then Zacharias poured incense on the flames and the fragrant smoke rose in clouds as a symbol of the prayers of Israel.

While standing there in the solemn silence, rapt in holy exaltation, a mysterious Presence, the angel Gabriel, appeared on the right side of the altar. This was the first of the angel visitants that flashed and hovered around the birth of our Lord. Four hundred years had passed since any prophetic or angelic message had come to the chosen people, but now the long silence was broken and frequent messengers sped to and fro between heaven and earth.

The aged priest was frightened at the vision, as all men are at the spiritual and spectral. Sin has made us such foreigners to the other world that we are afraid of its approach and touch. Yet the angel that caused the fear also brought a message that casts out all fear.

3. A Joyous Announcement

The angel spoke and the first word of the gospel history fell upon human ears. "Fear not," was the first word to Zacharias, as it was the first word to the shepherds. "Be not afraid" said Christ to the disciples in the storm.

Christ comes to us to do us no harm, his gospel is glad tidings to cast fear out of our hearts and bring us peace.

Reasons were given to Zacharias why he should not fear. His prayer had been heard. Long and earnestly had the pious priest prayed for a blessing until all hope of an answer was gone. Perhaps he had moments when he doubted the efficacy of prayer. Yet his prayers were heard in heaven and had been stored up until they had accumulated such pressure upon the divine will as drew forth a blessing. God was only waiting his own time.

"Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John." How the old man's heart must have leaped at the announcement! A passionate hope long dead suddenly sprang into life and overpowered him with joy. No news was sweeter to Hebrew ears than the message, "Unto us a son is given." This brought the fulfillment of their most earnest desire and possibly put them in the Messianic lineage.

Yet a son is not always a joy and sometimes turns the sweetest hope into the sharpest agony. Zacharias was secured against this dark possibility by the assurance that he should have joy and gladness in his son and that many should rejoice at his birth.

4. True Greatness

The angel next proceeded to sketch the character of the coming son. He should be "great." Greatness is a universal human aim and effort. Any father's heart would swell with pride at the knowledge that his son should attain greatness, perhaps without stopping to inquire as to the moral character of the distinction.

Yet if we put a period after the word "great" in the angel's promise we have reached no sure ground for rejoicing. Greatness may be built on rottenness,

and at last such greatness shall go up as dust; the higher it rises the deeper it shall fall.

Some things that men call great are very small when measured by true standards. We know nothing of the value of greatness until we have examined its foundation and tested its moral quality.

The angel had something better to say to Zacharias than that his son should be great: "great in the sight of the Lord," was the announcement. Now we may put a period to the promise, for its foundation is solid and its measure is full. The Lord knows what greatness is, and the man upon whom he sets his seal is great indeed.

This greatness is not the privilege of a chosen or gifted few, but is open to us all.

The coming son should touch neither wine nor strong drink; he was to be a Nazarite (Num. 6:1–21), a man set apart from the ordinary occupations and comforts of life and devoted exclusively to the service of God. "And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb." This was the eternal foundation of his greatness: it went down to and rested upon the Rock of Ages. God was to be in him from the beginning.

The son that has such holy heredity and keeps his life in God may remain humble and obscure in the sight of men, but he shall ever be great in the sight of the Lord.

5. A Worthy Work

The angel now crowns the promise of the coming man with a prophecy of his work. The great man must do something worthy of his eminence, or his greatness shrinks into nothingness. "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God."

The great man takes up a great work that gears itself into the plan of God and lays hold on eternity. He turns no man towards evil, but many towards righteousness and God.

"And he shall go before his face in the spirit and power of Elijah." Before whose face? The antecedent of "his" can only be "the Lord their God," so early is the purple of divinity thrown around the Christ. He shall "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children," knitting together severed families and

restoring domestic peace and joy; and he shall turn the feet of those that have slipped from the path of obedience into the wisdom of the just. Thus he shall "make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

John the Baptist must go before Jesus and preach the stern message of repentance and open the door of penitence through which Christ can enter the heart. Every epochal personage coming into the world must have a long preparation for his entrance. There would be no use in bringing Sir Isaac Newton into the world sixteen centuries before Christ: he must wait until sixteen centuries after Christ before the world will be prepared to understand and receive his teaching.

Jesus Christ was subject to the same principle and had to wait the fullness of time. John the Baptist was only the last of the great prophets that went before and prepared the way for him, and still must we go before him to make the world ready for his larger and fuller advent.

The work of John the Baptist is not ended but is being extended through all the Christian centuries and we must still carry it on. We stand in this line, the torch heralding the coming of the Light of the world is now committed to our hands and we must carry it to those around us and into the far and dark places of the earth.

Thus John's greatness was sketched out in prophecy before ever he was born; and he fulfilled the promise so that Jesus declared that among them that were born of women, there was none greater than he.

Yet this John, standing so lofty among men, was only a herald whose footprints would be quickly obliterated in the dust by the chariot wheels of One coming after him, the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose.

LESSON II.—OCTOBER 8

THE BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

The Religious Training of the Young

Golden Text: And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. Luke, 2:52.

Devotional Reading: Isa. 9:1–7.

Reference Material: Matt. 1:18–2:23.

Lesson Text: Luke, 2:40–52

40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.
41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.
42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.
43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not *of it.*
44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among *their* kinsfolk and acquaintance.
45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.
46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.
47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.
48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.
49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?
50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.
51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.
52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***Jesus Grew in the Home.***
2. ***The Boy Jesus in Jerusalem.***
3. ***A Mother's Painful Moment.***
4. ***Subject unto His Parents.***

Two or three descriptive verses and one anecdote tell us all we know of the childhood of Jesus. We would like to know more: for we are interested in the childhood of great men. We are curious to see whether the stamp of greatness was on them from the beginning, or whether at first they were undistinguishable from other children.

Sometimes genius buds in childhood, as in Mozart and Macaulay, but in other cases it sleeps and is unsuspected for many years. It lies like an explosive in the brain until some spark of circumstance touches it off, or like a seed which must wait for its summer. Precocity is not always a favorable sign and is often followed by arrested development.

We wonder what may have been the boyhood of Jesus and long for a peep behind the veil of silence that hides his early years. As usual the apocryphal gospels are most voluble where the inspired gospels are most reticent. They fill the childhood of Jesus with marvels and miracles that are irrational and absurd.

The broad difference between the books that were put in the Bible and the books that were kept out is one of the wonders and proofs of inspiration. The gospels hide the boyhood of Jesus from our view with an impressive silence, and yet we have some general knowledge of his youth.

1. Jesus Grew in the Home

The broad fact that is written across the youth of Jesus is that he grew up in the home. His mother's life was closer to him and more vital in its touch than any other human influence and in a sense made him.

His eyes were kindled into light by the love of her eyes and from her lips he caught his first smile. She nursed him in her arms, played with him as he cooed and laughed, and rocked him to sleep with a cradle song. She taught him his first childish words, and he clung to her hand as he took his first stumbling steps. From her he first heard the stories of the Hebrew Bible, and at her knees he lisped his first prayer. She poured into him all the love of her heart, and he absorbed her life.

Thus the child grew into the likeness of his mother, and the impress of her spirit and training was upon him through all his years. He played in his father's carpenter shop and went to the village school. There were brothers in the home, and he grew up with them. He associated with the boys of Nazareth and was full of play.

We draw the line at any wrong thought or act. He was human, yet he was sinless. But he was not a grown-up boy, such as we used to find in the Sunday

school books, old and pious beyond his years. He was not morbidly self-conscious and sanctimonious, but a genuine boy, artless, inquiring, spirited, with his entire nature in free and healthy play. The whole charm of his boyhood lies in the fact that he was a boy and not something else.

Thirty years he lived in seclusion before he came forth strong to do his work. He got ready before he began, and this is the secret of those years of silence.

Children are often hurried forward too fast and pushed into publicity too soon. Parents are ambitious to have their children show signs of brightness and surpass other children, and they crowd them forward under high pressure and often they injure them and sometimes they kill them.

It is pitiful to see children, through hot-house education or through dress and fashion, despoiled of their youth and made old beyond their years. Let them grow up and take things as they come; they will be young men and women soon enough.

Do not thrust them into the excitement and glare of the world, but keep them in seclusion and let them quietly increase in stature and wax strong in spirit, as Jesus did, until their time has come.

2. The Boy Jesus in Jerusalem

The single recorded incident in the boyhood of Jesus is "a solitary flowret out of the wonderful enclosed garden of thirty years." It occurred when he was twelve years of age. This was a critical age and turning-point in the life of a Jewish boy.

At this age he was obliged to learn a trade for his own support; he began to wear the phylacteries; and he became "a son of the law" and in some degree was released from parental control. At twelve he began to act upon his own responsibility and to take care of himself, and this fact throws light upon this incident.

Every year the parents of Jesus went up to Jerusalem to the feast of the Passover, the great religious festival and holiday of the Jews. Jesus had now reached the age when he was under obligation to go with them. Probably for the first time he stepped out of the seclusion of Nazareth into the publicity of the metropolis.

It must have been with emotions of deep wonder and reverence and joy that he entered the holy city and witnessed its scenes and shared in the service of

the temple. He had a boy's interest and delight in the sights of the city, but the chief center of interest for him was his Father's house.

While at the feast the boy became separated from his parents, and they started home without him, supposing that he was in the caravan with friends—a not unlikely or unusual occurrence. As he did not appear at the end of the first day's journey, however, they became alarmed and started back to Jerusalem to find him. On the third day they found him in the temple in the midst of the rabbis, hearing them and asking them questions, and displaying such wisdom that all were amazed.

It is a critical hour with a youth when he enters a great city and is left there to himself. Its attractions open before his feet many an alluring path to ruin.

Jesus was susceptible to these temptations, but his religious instinct drew him to his Father's house. He did not leave his religion in the village home when he went to the city.

The youth that is true to God in the city is safe.

This scene in the boyhood of Jesus has sometimes been despoiled of its truth and beauty by making it out that he was instructing these rabbis and showing off his superior wisdom. On the contrary, he was hearing them and asking them questions; he was not teacher but scholar.

Jesus never played the part of a smart boy, but was modest and teachable and kept his place in the presence of superiors; and it was his rare spirit of wisdom and candor that excited the admiration of those that heard him.

A docile spirit is a beautiful thing in a child, and it is just as beautiful in mid-life and old age. It is one of the primary elements of Christian character and of all greatness.

3. A Mother's Painful Moment

The parents were astonished—struck with admiration, as the strong Greek word means—at the scene. Parents are proverbially pleased and proud of signs of promise in their children, and Mary and Joseph experienced this delight in a rare degree as the religious genius of Jesus began to flash out.

Yet there was also an ominous element in the situation which drew from the anxious mother the chiding question, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?

behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." She realized that the lines of parental control were slipping from her hands and that henceforth she could govern her boy less and less and he would act for himself more and more.

That was a painful moment for Mary, and it is usually a painful moment for every father and mother when they see their children begin to separate themselves and assert their own individuality and responsibility. But this step is necessary and best for children. Ripened seeds must drop off the tree, or there would be no more trees.

Mary's question elicited from Jesus his first recorded utterance. "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" This reply is the kernel of this anecdote, the vital germ in it that has kept it alive and caused it to blossom out in the gospel. It expresses surprise in the mind of Jesus that his parents did not know that the attractions of the temple had kept him and that there was his proper place and chief business.

We are here brought to the edge of the question, How early did Jesus become conscious of his divinity and his mission as the Messiah? Into this mystery we cannot penetrate, but at twelve years of age he had firmly grasped the deepest purpose of life. Already his life was perfectly set to the music of the Father's will. Life with him was not idleness, or wealth, or pleasure, but service in his Father's house.

Many people waste a good portion of life in finding out what they are here for, and some die without ever knowing why they were born. Young people should discover as early as they can what their mission in life is, and they should know in their childhood that this mission is not mere money-making, or pleasure-seeking, but is the Father's business.

The parents of Jesus understood not his first recorded utterance—a sad commentary and mournful prophecy. How often has he been misunderstood and misrepresented so that his light has been turned into darkness? He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

And still the world misunderstands him, and very imperfectly do even the clearest Christian minds penetrate into the depth and power of his meaning. His simple words are larger than our largest thoughts of life and love.

4. Subject unto His Parents

"And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them": a wonderful record is this of the Son of God. Subject unto them: received instruction and guidance from them and yielded obedience to them.

This relation, of course, had in it no element of severity and bondage. There were no unreasonable harsh restraints on the one side, and no willfulness and waywardness on the other. Obedience was the disposition and habit and joy of Jesus. He kept the fifth commandment and so increased in favor with God and men.

This was the beginning of the path of obedience that led him all the way through the temptation past the cross up to the throne. Had he begun by disobeying his earthly father, he would have ended by disobeying his heavenly Father.

Obedience is a foundation stone on which all life is built, and it is laid in the home in obeying parents. True obedience is not bondage, but noble liberty. The steel track does not infringe upon the liberty of the locomotive, but gives it all the liberty it has. Right commandments are the steel tracks along which we can drive ourselves at utmost speed with perfect safety and thus enjoy the fullest liberty.

Obedience to wise parents trains children in wisdom and self-control and strong character, and these are safety and life. But children that leave the home self-willed and disobedient will be driven about by the winds of impulse and passion and are likely to go to pieces on the rocks. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

LESSON III.—OCTOBER 15

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Repentance: What It Is and What It Does

Golden Text: Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matt. 3:2.

Devotional Reading: Isa. 40:1–11.

Reference Material: Matt. 2:11–19; Phil. 2:5–11.

Lesson Text: Luke, 3:7–17

7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.
9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?
11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.
12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?
13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.
14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse *any* falsely; and be content with your wages.
15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not;
16 John answered, saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:
17 Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. A Man with a Message.

2. The Message of Repentance.

3. A Fearless Preacher.

4. A Sermon That Brought Conviction.

5. A Powerful Temptation.

A great revival meeting was going on down in the Jordan valley. The preacher was John the Baptist. Nothing had been heard of him for thirty years during which he was growing up in the hill country of Judea in that seclusion and silence in which all great things must grow.

John was a Nazarite, we might call him a monk, a man who had withdrawn himself from human society and for years had lived a solitary life in the rocky regions around the Dead Sea. His clothing consisted of a loose mantle or sack of coarse haircloth bound around his loins with a leather strap; and he lived on locusts and wild honey. His life was close to the earth on its material side, but on its spiritual side it was close to the sky: for he lived in meditation and prayer.

What was the meaning of this strange life? It was a reaction and protest against the formal hypocritical religion of his time. Religion among the Jews had gone to seed. There was no sap in it, there were no green leaves and ripening fruit on it, but only pods and husks.

The ceremonial system of Moses, good and necessary in its time, had grown into a hard formality and hollow hypocrisy from which humble sincere souls turned away in loathing.

Jewish orthodoxy had thus become a huge heap of dry wood and straw: John the Baptist was the spark that set this tinder on fire; he was the Martin Luther of this reformation. Disgusted with Pharisaic hypocrisy, he turned from the Jewish church into the wilderness: not that he might have less religion, but more; that out there in the solitude far from men he might get close to God, as Moses did in the mount.

1. A Man with a Message

At length, being filled with the Spirit, John suddenly emerged from obscurity and appeared down on the banks of the Jordan where he began to preach. His striking personality, rough haircloth garment with its leather strap, uncut hair, flowing beard, and deep-set, burning eye suggested a prophet.

The news reached Jerusalem that there was a prophet at the Jordan, and the crowds went pouring down the steep rocky roads to hear him. The excitement spread through the land, and the people came from every quarter.

What was the secret of the preacher's power? Not his manner of dress and appearance. Eccentricities never made a Martin Luther or a John Knox Long hair does not make a long head.

John the Baptist was a sincere soul touched with the fire of God. He had

got rid of empty forms and conventional cant and was speaking out his genuine beliefs and deep fiery emotions. Instead of mumbling traditional dogmas, John spoke living truth from the heart to the heart.

He was a man with a message who brought religion back to reality and made it a living burning power.

Such preaching created a tremendous sensation and drew people in great crowds. They had been fed on empty husks long enough and wanted bread.

The desiccation of our creed is ever one of the greatest dangers of religion. When the spirit evaporates out of it and leaves it dry and dead, it becomes so much chaff fit only to be burned up or blown away.

We need to keep the sap of life circulating through our creed and ever breathe the holy breath of God that our faith may keep full of fresh vitality and fruitfulness.

2. The Message of Repentance

The burning message of John was repentance as a preparation for the Messiah, who was about to appear. All this false religion had to be got rid of to make room for the true religion. The ground must be cleared of thorn roots that the good seed may be planted.

Repentance prepares the way for Christ in our hearts and lives. Sinful moods and motives, passions and pursuits, are obstructive and antagonistic to the presence of Christ in our souls, and must be uprooted and cast out before his Spirit can come in. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Repentance is the reaction of the soul against sin. The Greek word means "a change of mind," a mental act that reverses the mind and will towards sin. It is thus in its root not an emotion, but a volition, which we can exercise and for which we are responsible. It is a perception of guilt that grows into pain and overpowers our love for sin.

As an outer sign of such inner repentance, John instituted and administered the rite of baptism. The outer sign confirms the inner act and roots it deeper in the soul, and we should receive this seal of our faith.

John also quoted the prophet Isaiah to prove that his message had ancient authority and divine sanction. The truth he was preaching was not revolutionary but evolutionary; the new grew out of the old and was its blossoming

and fruitage. Isaiah was the original: John was the echo; Isaiah declared the message of repentance: John interpreted and applied it.

Every sin of ours puts an obstruction before the wheels of Christ's chariot, and we should clear it away that his path may be straight and smooth.

3. A Fearless Preacher

This preacher was not afraid of his congregation, though it had powerful people in it. A great multitude was massed before John, but he faced them withour fear and struck straight and hard at their sins.

Among the multitudes, whom did John espy but Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 3:7) from Jerusalem? It must have surprised the fervent preacher to see these hypocritical prelates and worldly skeptics coming to hear his fiery denunciations. Will not the preacher, who has been so hotly denouncing sin, now smooth his words and grow polite and cool and colorless in his preaching before these powerful dignitaries of the church and the world?

No, John only made his arrows sharper and shot them straight at these doctors of divinity. "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance."

That showed the magnificent courage of the preacher. John was brave as a lion, and the presence of these big sinners from Jerusalem only roused his might and fire. He called them by a name that scorched and branded their guilt, and he gave them the same message of repentance that he did to the rabble and scum of the city.

As Carlyle thought that the worst man in England would probably be found, not down in the slums of London, but up in the House of Lords, so John thought the worst sinners in Judea were these Pharisees and Sadducees.

Official position in the church is no assurance of holiness and protection against fiery condemnation. One may wear its sacred robes and stand in its pulpit, or at its communion table, and yet conceal vipers in his heart.

"And begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father": that is just what they were saying. They prided themselves on their birth and ancestry and thought they were made of finer clay and richer blood than others, and were therefore safe in their superiority.

But John dealt this pride a crushing blow: "for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." He told them that

their proud birth and blood counted for nothing and that God could make better people out of the common rocks and dirt of the earth.

> **Good birth is something to appreciate and guard, but when it is turned into selfish exclusiveness and trusted as a substitute for personal worth, it becomes foolish and wicked pride that shall be cast down into the dust.**

John further told his hearers that it was no use for them to trust in such things, for the axe was now laid at the root of the tree and every false faith should be cast into the fire.

4. A Sermon That Brought Conviction

This searching sermon brought conviction and alarm to many of the hearers and drew from them the exclamation, "What shall we do?" They were right in thinking that they must do something to find out and walk in the way of life, and John with great skill and tact adapted the message to each class of hearers.

To the people he said, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." In the hard selfish strife of their day they were to bless other lives and beautify their own souls with the spirit of charity.

Publicans were told to practice no extortion, and soldiers to do no violence. Each one was bidden to repent of and renounce the sin that specially beset him.

> **The gospel does not simply deal in glittering generalities, but fits itself closely into each one's own life and heart, pierces every soul at the point of its own guilt, and bids us to repent and cease to do evil.**

5. A Powerful Temptation

So great were the popularity and prestige of John that the people were wondering whether he were not the Christ. It was a splendid opportunity and critical hour for this preacher. A wave of popularity was swiftly bearing him on its topmost crest towards power. The people were ready to believe anything about him and to do anything for him.

All he needed to do was to announce himself the Messiah, and the nation would accept him with burning zeal, and there was no telling what grand

results might be achieved. A glittering crown seemed to be just within his grasp.

Why not take it? Very plausible arguments would play amound the mind of the preacher to persuade him that this was the right thing to do. Would he not use such power for the good of men and the glory of God? And who knew but that he was indeed come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

The temptation to seize offered opportunities to power and turn them to personal ends is one of the strongest that can strike the human mind.

This was the master stroke with which Satan assailed Christ. When we look into our own hearts and lives and see how quick we are to push ourselves into the first place and seize everything that comes our way, we may know something of the strength and greed of this temptation.

To let pass an opportunity of enriching ourselves at another's expense, to stand out of another's way, to efface self and become lost in the popularity of a rival—who of us is sufficient for this?

This was the temptation that beat against John as he grew in prestige and the people reasoned in their hearts whether he were not the Christ. But he gave no sign of the struggle as he told the truth about himself, confessing, "I am not the Christ," and declaring, "One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose."

Out of this marvelous self-effacement of John shines the unmatched splendor of his humility and supreme devotion to Christ. Yet of this man Jesus himself declared that there was born of women none greater than he.

LESSON IV.—OCTOBER 22

JESUS TEMPTED

What Christ's Victory Means to Us

Golden Text: For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted. Heb. 2:18.

Devotional Reading: Heb. 4:14–5:10.

Reference Material: Phil. 2:5–11; Heb. 2:14–18; 4:14–16.

Lesson Text: Luke, 4:1–13

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,
2 Being forty days tempted of the devil, And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.
3 And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.
4 And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.
5 And the devil, taking him up into a high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.
6 And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will, I give it.
7 If thou therefore wilt worship me all shall be thine.
8 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.
9 And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence:
10 For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee:
11 And in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.
12 And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.
13 And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Meaning of the Temptation.
2. Bread out of Stones.
3. The World for a Word.
4. Leaping into Popularity.
5. It Is Written.

Immediately after his baptism Jesus was led up into the wilderness to be tempted. Baptism and temptation are here crowded close together. Scarcely had the voice from heaven died away when a whisper was heard from hell. Out of the baptismal benediction of the Father Jesus stepped into a desperate struggle with the devil.

There are sudden and violent changes of weather in the spiritual world. It was while coming down from the mount where for forty days he had held communion with God that Moses lost his temper and smashed the tables of the law to pieces. It was just after leaving the communion table that Peter denied his Lord and swore that he did not know him.

The purest deed may be bordered with temptation; our finest moods may be marred by an evil suggestion. When God is especially near blessing us, Satan is near by waiting for his chance.

Jesus was also led up of the Spirit to be tempted. His temptation was no accident or evil fate, but a divine appointment.

Temptation has its place and use in the world. There is nothing wrong on our part in being tempted: the wrong begins only when we begin to consent to it.

Yet we are not to run into temptation of our own accord. We may not hunt the devil or go into his den ourselves. The path of duty as we are led of the Spirit will take us into temptation enough.

It was when Jesus was hungry and wasted with forty days' fasting and was reduced to the lowest point of physical exhaustion that this temptation struck him. Satan did not assault him at his strongest moment, but at his frailest hour when his vitality was at its lowest ebb. Satan knows a man's weakest time and waits for it.

There are dangerous low tides in the strongest life. The best man has his hours when he would not dare meet the devil. These irresolute moments are often connected with bodily exhaustion and nervous depression. We need to keep a constant grip on the strength of God that when we are weak we may be strong.

1. The Meaning of the Temptation

Before the conflict begins let us take a general view of it and consider its meaning. What was the situation and state of mind with Jesus at this time?

He had just come up from his baptism which probably marked the moment when he became fully conscious of his Messiahship and divinity and supernatural power. He now knew that he was the Son of God at whose bidding stones would turn into bread and water into wine.

Seized and overwhelmed with this mighty consciousness, Jesus went into the wilderness to meditate upon and determine how he was to handle this tremendous power. What would be the first, most natural, strongest and most deadly temptation in the possession of such power? To use it selfishly for personal ends.

This is the temptation that always arises in connection with the sudden acquisition of power, as when a man gains great wealth or high office. Sudden power of any kind puts a severe strain on character and is a dangerous possession.

The pressing question on the mind of Jesus may have been, How would he use his divine power? For personal comfort and aggrandizement? or only in the service of God for the salvation of the world? It was a critical and perilous moment with him.

If he were to use his power one way, he would be lost; if he were to use it the other way, the world would be saved. Satan saw this psychological moment, and he was there to try to push Jesus off the edge of the right use of his power into the bottomless pit.

This selfish use of power was the poisoned point of each of the three arrows that Satan shot at Jesus.

2. Bread out of Stones

"If thou art the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread." The very tip of this temptation is a doubt. This was the tip of the first arrow of temptation Satan shot into the world so that he has not improved his weapons in thousands of years. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

Doubt is the mother of disobedience. Get us to doubt God and truth and duty, and it is a short and easy step into sin.

Jesus, having fasted forty days, craved food in every fiber of his body, and Satan kindled his appetite into a veritable fire with the thought of fresh

fragrant bread. The proposal was that he should get bread, not by taking it away from others, but by creating it himself.

How innocent and reasonable and necessary and right this seemed! But Jesus saw through its false innocence into its black heart. For it was a temptation to use his power for his own gratification, and if he did this once he would do it again, and in thus saving his life he would lose it.

Deeper still, this was practical distrust of God. Would not the Father provide, and shall he in his very first extremity cut loose from God and take care of himself? So this seemingly innocent act would have been his first step away from God. Therefore Jesus smote the evil thought with the trustful declaration, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God"; and that temptation lay dead.

But it is not dead for us. Appetite is still for Satan our most vulnerable point of attack. He not only plays upon our natural and rightful appetites, but he has created new and false ones with which he destroys men.

And how artfully is the plea of necessity made? "I must make a living and therefore must continue in this evil business. I must compete with rivals and therefore cannot be too scrupulous about methods." The necessity for bread is thus supposed to make any wrong right and to wipe out the whole decalogue.

Anything to get a living and make money is the devil's creed. But it is not necessary that we should live at all. There is only one moral necessity upon us: to trust God and keep his commandments.

3. The World for a Word

"If thou therefore shalt worship me, all shall be thine." It was an appeal to Christ's human ambition, holding up before him a glittering dazzling prize. It was offering him a short cut to the universal kingdom he had come to gain through the slow pathway of the cross.

It was a temptation to resort to worldly means to get the unworldly kingdom. Why not win the kingdom in a moment by one little act, even get the whole world by a word? How frequent and strong is this temptation with us?

Satan spreads out before us, not all the kingdoms of this world, but only some little portion of it: as much as we can see from our door-step, or over our counter or office desk; we want it, and many are willing to bend the knee to the devil to get it.

How strong is the temptation to take the short cut to our ambition? The way of righteous getting, of slow growth, of patient toil and sacrifice, the way of the cross, is not to our liking. We want the kingdom at a stroke and are in danger of selling our souls to get it.

Jesus felt the full force of this temptation. He gazed upon the splendid picture and fascinating scene of that outspread world. He saw how short was the step to the promised throne. Then turning in resistless might, he tore the mask from his tempter, revealed him in his hideous nakedness as Satan, bade him from the presence of his face and declared his eternal allegiance and loyalty to God.

Another poison-tipped arrow had failed to pierce the armor of Jesus and fell harmless at his feet.

4. Leaping into Popularity

"If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee." This temptation is just the opposite of the first one. Defeated on one side, Satan slips around and attacks Jesus on the other.

The first temptation was that Jesus should trust God too little: this one is that he should trust him too much; that he should be presumptuous in his trust. It was a suggestion that he could fly from the appointed path of obedience to the laws of life off at any angle of wild caprice, that he could do just as he pleased, and God would keep him.

Even faith may become presumptuous and disobedient. We want God to keep us, not in all his ways, but in all our ways.

The faith cure, in so far as it refuses or neglects to use natural means, is virtually a proposal to jump from the pinnacle of the temple of natural law without getting hurt, to set natural laws at defiance and expect God to work a miraculous deliverance.

This temptation also involved the use of Christ's power for a personal end. For the object seems to have been that he should gain the applause of the multitude and thereby get himself accepted as the Messiah; it was another short cut by which he was to leap into popularity.

The Jews wanted a Messiah that would come with observation in power and

pomp; and this advent from the temple would be received with such popular enthusiasm that it would make Jesus king at a jump.

But he saw through this proposal also, and smote it with the declaration, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," and the last arrow from Satan's quiver lay harmless at the feet of Jesus.

The Son of God was still untouched; not one fleck had spotted the immaculate whiteness of his soul. And the devil, foiled, defeated and crushed, fled and vanished into the infinite darkness whence he came.

5. It Is Written

Mark the means by which Jesus resisted these temptations: "It is written." "It is written." "It is written." The Word of God was his shield, and by it every flaming dart was quenched.

Yet it was not by the mere quoting of Scripture that Jesus defended himself, for the devil could quote Scripture too. It was by his grip on the realities back of the words that he conquered. The sense of God's Fatherhood, trust in him, steady sober obedience to him, unswerving loyalty to him, were his support.

He conquered by the ordinary means of grace. He did not call into action his divinity, but he bore this temptation in his humanity. He was tempted as we are and he conquered as we may.

We need no new weapons to resist Satan, for still "it is written." The old Bible furnishes shields and swords to match all the temptations of our modern life. What we need in our temptations is a stronger grasp on these eternal verities of God's Word.

In proportion as we believe and feel these truths shall we have power to resist evil; and when our whole consciousness is filled with them Satan cannot touch us. Resist the devil and he will flee from you; and when he is gone, the angels of God will come.

LESSON V.—OCTOBER 29

WORLD-WIDE PROHIBITION—WORLD'S TEMPERANCE SUNDAY

Progress of Prohibition Throughout the World

Golden Text: Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. Prov. 14:34.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 93.

Reference Material: Matt. 7:15–20; Rom. 14:13.

Lesson Text: Isaiah, 61:1–9

The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are* bound;

2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called Trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

4 ¶ And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.

5 And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien *shall be* your ploughmen and your vinedressers.

6 But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: *men* shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.

7 ¶ For your shame *ye shall have* double; and *for* confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess the double: everlasting joy shall be unto them.

8 For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

9 And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they *are* the seed *which* the LORD hath blessed.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. The First Text of Jesus.

2. Building the Old Wastes.

3. Ministers of God.

4. Loving Judgment and Hating Robbery.

Isaiah is the evangelical prophet, sounding forth the good news in his day which afterwards became more fully vocal on the lips of angels and came to complete expression in the teaching of Jesus and his apostles.

The prophecy in this passage is vibrant in every line and word with this good news and may be applied to all the aspects and works of the gospel in the world.

Of course it is in some degree cast in the picturesque and figurative language of prophecy and must be interpreted in the light of its growing fulfillment in our day. Some of its images are materialistic and were taken literally by the Jews, but we accept them as symbols of far greater and more splendid spiritual realities.

The application of the principles of the passage to temperance and prohibition can be easily and properly made at every point.

1. The First Text of Jesus

It is an intensely interesting fact that the first two verses of the passage were used by Jesus as the text of his first recorded sermon, which he delivered in his home synagogue at Nazareth. We read in the Gospel of Luke that when he had read these verses "he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

The sermon is not recorded, but we are sure that it was a fitting exposition of the text; and while the congregation at first wondered at its gracious words, yet in the end they rose in wrath against the preacher and thrust him out of their city: they would not stand plain truth.

The most striking and significant fact in connection with this first sermon of Jesus is that he quietly appropriated this prophecy to himself, declaring that "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears," and thereby identified himself with the promised Messiah of the Old Testament.

Many prophets had predicted and long ages had waited for the coming One, and now Jesus stepped forth and announced himself to be the fulfillment of this passionate hope. "I that speak unto thee am he." Such a bold assumption would have been brazen presumption on the part of any ordinary man, but Jesus assumed and wore this crown with ease and naturalness and dignity because it was his eternal right.

No more appropriate and suggestive text for the first sermon of Jesus could

have been found in the whole Old Testament and it still stands as a full and rich expression of the gospel message.

The gospel is ever good tidings and it comes to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of prison to them that are bound.

Sin is bitter bondage as it fetters and imprisons every fiber of flesh and faculty of the soul. It roots itself in terrible slavery in the appetites of the body, poisons and wounds all its delicate tissues and saturates it with disease; and even more fatally does it infiltrate its poison through all the mental and moral and spiritual faculties of the soul and binds it with habits that strong crying and tears cannot unloose or break.

One way of escaping this bondage is total abstinence from the use of intoxicating drink and prohibition of the manufacture and sale of such deadly stuff. The battle for the right of such prohibition has been theoretically won in this country, though its practical execution is yet to be fully achieved. Intoxicating liquors are to be classed with high explosives and poisonous gases, the manufacture of which is put under strict surveillance.

Near the close of the Great War the American government through expert chemists had devised and was manufacturing a poison gas many times more destructive and deadly than any such gas that had been produced and was preparing to launch it against the enemy, and it was predicted that it would blot out great cities by a single discharge of bombs dropped from an airship.

At the armistice all that terrible stuff was carried far out into the Atlantic and sunk; so deadly was it that its mere presence could not be tolerated in the country and the manufacture of not a drop of it would now be permitted.

The same principle and policy logically applies to the manufacture of intoxicating drink, which is a far more dangerous poison, destroying many times as many men and threatening the manhood and social fabric of our nation.

The gospel is dynamite to blow up this evil business and put it out of the way of tempting and corrupting our people and is a mighty voice proclaiming liberty to these captives and the opening of the prison to them that are thus bound.

2. Building the Old Wastes

The Messiah inspires and leads his people not only to tear down, but also to build. The gospel is not simply a negative destructive force, but it is also a positive constructive spirit and agency. "And they shall build the old wastes, and raise up the former desolations."

Strong drink has done an incalculable amount of destructive work in the world. There are not books enough on the earth or shelf room in all our libraries to hold the statistics and specifications of the ruin it has wrought. It has weakened, poisoned, crippled and destroyed more men than all the wars and battles of history.

The gospel undertakes and has the power to rebuild this wasted and wrecked manhood.

It works from within to impart and arouse a new spirit of penitence and faith and obedience by which it sets men free and builds them up in a new life in Christ. And the gospel also works from without in removing and prohibiting the temptations of the saloon and the intoxicating cup so that men will not be exposed to this deadly poison gas.

It is actually doing this work on a large and increasing scale, and every community can show men that have been thus reclaimed.

That prohibition is practically working out its program is evidenced in every city and place by the facts of greatly decreased drunkenness and crime. Empty jails are an eloquent witness that cannot be denied or refuted.

That this work is yet only imperfectly carried out is to be expected and defects in the law and in the enforcement of the law will be remedied as we go along. The old wastes of wasted capital and labor will also be replaced by turning these agencies into productive industry, and many a brewery and distillery that once produced the means of death are now turning out goods that are the means of life.

3. Priests and Ministers of God

In the olden time priests were a select class, carefully distinguished from other men and surrounded and blessed with peculiar privileges and comforts and power; in exclusiveness and special favors they belonged in the same class with kings.

But now under the broader administration of the gospel all believers are " made kings and priests unto God " (Rev. 1:6).

This means that as priests we have direct access to God in our own persons and do not have to approach him in the name of another; and it further means that we have the right and power to speak in behalf of God as we proclaim his truth and minister in his name.

We are also all ministers of God, his servants to carry his truth and grace everywhere among men, crossing every boundary of class and condition and race and country.

We are doing this in our own churches and communities and are broadening this ministry out into home missions and around the world in foreign missions.

Having received any blessing of God, we are not to keep it to ourselves, shutting it up in our own hearts and lives, which would be as selfish as though we were to enjoy the sunlight and then try to screen it off from every other people and part of the planet.

Among other obvious applications, this principle applies to prohibition. If it is good for our country it is also good for other countries, and it is our privilege and duty to carry it to them by such information and example and persuasion as will commend it to them and lead to its adoption abroad and eventually around the world.

Pagan China has set the Christian world a tremendous example of prohibition in her heroic determination to exterminate the opium culture and traffic, and what he saw there convinced Professor E. A. Ross, an eminent American sociologist, on the grounds of pure science and national welfare that we ought to do the same thing with the liquor traffic to save our nation.

It is right, then, that we should seek to extend the principle and the policy of prohibition to other countries, and we have made a promising beginning in this program, as is witnessed by what one apostle of world prohibition, " Pussyfoot Johnson," accomplished in England and Scotland.

This world movement is being ridiculed by many as visionary and futile, but so was the abolition of slavery ridiculed in early days in this country, yet constant agitation in the face of opposition and persecution finally won the day. So was prohibition opposed and laughed at in this country, but it made

headway through a century of education until its hour struck and the victory came almost in a year.

All great moral and spiritual movements are derided in the beginning, but in the end they prove themselves to be the power of God unto salvation.

4. Loving Judgment and Hating Robbery

"For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery." What a wholesome sound have these words, how they cut like a sword through all human deceit and trickery and injustice.

The Lord loves judgment, for he is a just God, and we ever rest on the rock, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We are sure that he never does anything or enjoins on us any principle or commandment that is not just and good, the very law of his love and of our life. And as he loves judgment, so should we love it too and know that it is never unkind or harsh but is the very goodness of God.

And the Lord equally hates robbery. He respects all rights, whether of property or of person, never depriving anyone unjustly of anything, and he would have us follow the same path.

"Hate" is a good strong word that has its place in our life. One who is so sentimental and soft that he cannot hate probably cannot love, either, with any degree of stability and intensity.

If there is anything in all this world that we ought to hate it is the robbery that the saloon has inflicted on our manhood and our property and on our whole civilization. Therefore let us show our hatred for this robber by putting it out of business and keeping it out in our own country and around the world.

LESSON VI.—NOVEMBER 5

JESUS THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

Jesus' Ministry to Human Need

Golden Text: Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses. Matt. 8:17.

Devotional Reading: Isa. 63:7–14.

Reference Material: Matt. 9:35–38; Mark, 1:21–45.

Lesson Text: Luke, 5:17–26

17 And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them.

18 ¶ And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought *means* to bring him in, and to lay *him* before him.

19 And when they could not find by what *way* they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with *his* couch into the midst before Jesus.

20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?

24 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.

25 And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. Palsied People.

2. Human Help.

3. The Way Blocked.

4. Divine Power.

5. Critical Scribes.

Jesus was at this point in mid-career of his ministry and was not only drawing throngs of the people to hear him, but was also attracting the attention of the church authorities up at Jerusalem.

A delegation of scribes and Pharisees had come down to Galilee to investigate the new preacher's work and see if he were not a dangerous heretic. They were present on this occasion, watching him in a critical, if not a hostile, state of mind.

It is easy to see what we are looking for, and these men saw what they wanted.

1. Palsied People

While the people were flocking to Jesus, there was one man lying upon a bed in some neighboring house who could not come. He was afflicted with palsy, his nerves were paralyzed, and he could not move.

There are more palsied people than we think. The terrible disease is quite common, in fact universal. People that never imagine they have it may yet have it in its worst form.

How often is men's sense of justice and right palsied in their dealings with one another? It does not hurt them to overreach and defraud one another because that particular moral nerve has lost its sensitiveness.

How often are the nerves of truth and charity palsied in our social relations, and the nerves of unselfishness and affection in the home?

Many of our moral nerves show low sensibility and are working feebly. The sinner is palsied in his sense of sin and of God. The spiritual nerves that see the really great things of life, that perceive the beauty of holiness and thrill with the life of God, are paralyzed.

It is pitiful to see one helpless with physical palsy. There sits a man with strong bones and solid flesh that looks the very picture of ruddy health and strength, and yet he cannot move a muscle. His heart is beating, but his nerves are dead. To see that man is enough to touch feelings deep as tears.

But if we only had the insight to see a paralyzed soul, we would have infinitely more reason for pity and tears. Only higher than human power can cure palsy and especially the palsy of the soul.

2. Human Help

Higher power came to this paralytic first in the form of human help. Four friends, strong men who had in them some of the strength of God, took up the four corners of his bed and carried him to the great Healer.

We must carry one another in this world.

When one looks at his life, he sees that he is being carried by many others in many ways. If he is about to go on a journey, he is virtually powerless to go himself: four or forty men must take hold of him and by automobile and railway and steamship transport him to his destination. Many are helping us in building our houses, weaving our garments, and making our bread.

Men of genius bear us into regions of higher thought and finer sensibility; the thinker with his ideas; the poet on the wings of his imagination; the musician with his chords and songs; the painter with his brush, and the sculptor with his chisel.

Thousands and uncounted millions of people are toiling for us and really have hold of us and are carrying us each one; if they were to let go, we would fall and perish. Social life depends on our being "borne of four."

So is it in the spiritual life. We are not isolated from others, but are all woven into one web. Through man came our sin, and through man also comes our salvation.

Every saved soul has been brought to Christ through the sympathetic tones of a human voice and the warm grasp of a brother's hand. Bearing palsied sinners to Christ is our great mission in life. This is especially the work of parents and ministers and teachers.

3. The Way Blocked

Difficulties were encountered in bringing the palsied man to Jesus. A crowd blocked up the way. What disappointment must have been experienced by the four faithful friends, and what despair must have been depicted on the pale wan face of the helpless sufferer as they found they could not get nigh.

There are difficulties in the way of every good thing. One cannot march straight to wealth, or education, or skill, or attainment of any kind, without running against obstructions.

There is always ahead of us a crowd of other people who want the same thing. Life is a conflict, and every victory costs a battle.

Healing from the hand of Christ is no exception. There is a throng of people around Christ, and coming to him involves publicity. The public confession of sin and of faith is a hindrance to many.

In the crowd around Christ may be worldly people who will say things that will cut like a lash, and this is hard to face. There are also unworthy Christians that are stumbling blocks in the way of others. We may also imagine in the barrier around Christ the sinner's evil habits and disposition, the things he will have to fight with to get rid of; there are his doubts and his fears.

The devil is in that crowd. Many obstructions thus block up the way to keep the sinner from the Saviour.

What did these four men now do? Did they stop at the edge of the throng? Did the palsied man himself say, "It's no use trying to get there; there's no hope for me; take me home"? No, they were not men of such stuff. With them it was a matter of life and death and a moment for brave action.

If they could not get through that crowd, they could get over it. And so they got their man up on the top of the flat-roofed house just over where Jesus stood; and then, tearing a hole through the light thatch-work, they let the bed with the sick man right down at Jesus' feet.

And thus by the triumph of their faith the sinner and Saviour were brought together within speaking and touching distance. These men were not to be stopped by any hindrances and were not afraid of unconventional methods in getting a palsied man to Jesus.

We need more of the resourceful masterful faith and earnestness of these four men. Then will we not be stopped by barriers, but will tear the roof off, if necessary, to get lost ones to Christ.

4. Divine Power

Human help has gone as far as it can, and now divine power must intervene and act. "And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." Seeing their faith, he saved the other man.

The salvation of a soul has many links and is interwoven with many causes. Our faith is a factor in saving others. It overflows in other lives and may work unknown to us.

"Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." Jesus struck right through the man's palsy into his sin; he did not seem to see his palsy at all, but only his guilt. Why? Perhaps his palsy grew out of and was the penalty of his sins. It is almost intimated that it was the result of wrong living, as it often is with us.

But even if this was not the case, his palsy was the result of sin somewhere, for all human disease has roots running back into somebody's sin either near or far, lying on the surface or buried deep in heredity.

And the deepest trouble of this man was not his palsy but his guilt. His palsy was a mere symptom on the surface, a blotch on the skin. The root of his trouble was in his heart. To have cured him of his palsy and let his sin go uncleansed would have been of little consequence; it might have only sent him back to his sinful life and multiplied his power to do evil.

Jesus was always looking deeper than the body and the blood and never stopped with the clothes that people wore or the state of their health. He came to destroy evil at the root and in the germ. He would set man right at the core, make him pure and strong in his heart, and then all things else will right themselves and all the issues of life will flow pure.

The way to get better institutions, laws, sanitation, distribution of wealth, social justice, is first to get better men. These things will not make better men, but better men will make these things.

The world has need of scientists that can grapple with the unseen assassins of disease and of statesmen that can give us wiser laws; but its primary and greatest need is a Saviour who can strike through all these outer symptoms at the core and root within, saying, " Thy sins are forgiven thee."

5. Critical Scribes

The critical scribes now thrust themselves into this scene and pass hostile judgment on this action. The forgiveness pronounced by Jesus, that to the palsied man was a balm deeper than physical healing, in their sight was only blasphemy. They were looking for blasphemy and so they soon saw it.

"Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" was the thought with which the scribes condemned Jesus.

They were right in their theology, but were wrong in their application of it. They did not overestimate the significance of Christ's action, but they underestimated and wholly missed his divine authority.

Jesus perceived their skeptical hostile attitude and proposed to confront their unbelief with a physical demonstration. Some people can be reached only through their senses. Anything less coarse than a bodily sensation does not

affect them. They can see a stone or feel a blow, but they cannot perceive an idea or feel a fine sentiment.

Jesus submitted such a physical test: at his bidding the paralytic picked up his bed and walked out before all. The great Physician had not forgotten the man's palsy after all, and doubtless would have cured him without this criticism of the scribes. Their evil was drawn into the current of his goodness, but the stream would have flowed on in its course without their interference.

The healing of Jesus begins with the souls of men, but it also reaches their bodies. The walking paralytic was a proof of divinity that they all could appreciate.

"And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day." The works that Christ has scattered down through the centuries are an amazement to the discerning observer, and countless millions of people have witnessed to his power to heal both body and soul. Such healing was a strange thing in comparison with the futilities of the scribes and Pharisees and drew wondering exclamations from the people.

Jesus was always introducing new teachings and new fashions in religion. Conservatism and traditionalism had not so bound him that he could not do a new thing in a new way, but he was ever full of fresh resources and working unexpected results.

Many an old fashion has gripped the world and the church that we need to shake off. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

LESSON VII.—NOVEMBER 12

JESUS THE GREAT TEACHER

Jesus Teaching Us How to Live Together

Golden Text: As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. Luke, 6:31.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 119:9–16.

Reference Material: Matt. 5:1–18; John, 3:2; 6:68; Col. 2:3.

Lesson Text: Luke, 6:27–38

27 ¶ But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,
28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.
29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not *to take thy* coat also.
30 Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again.
31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.
32 For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.
33 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.
34 And if ye lend *to them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.
35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and *to* the evil.
36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.
37 Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:
38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. ***Loving Our Enemies.***
2. ***The Golden Rule.***
3. ***Mercy.***
4. ***Judging Others.***
5. ***Good Measure.***

Down from this Galilean mountain-top
Rolled words that are eternal laws of life,
More deeply grounded than its granite base;
Flowed strains of sweetness that have power to set
This inharmonious world in tune and cause
Our jarring lives to grow to mellow music.

After a night spent in prayer, Jesus with his disciples met a great multitude on one of the hills back of Capernaum, and from that lofty pulpit delivered the Sermon on the Mount that has gone resounding through the ages, and after two millenniums has lost none of its sweetness and saving power.

It is truly a mountain sermon, overtopping all human teachings and breathing the air of heaven. It sets forth the end and outcome of the kingdom of God in holiness of heart and life and may be said to contain the constitution and by-laws of this kingdom.

The world has not yet caught up with its simplest requirements. Saturate society with its spirit and the world would be washed pure and the kingdom of God have come. One day filled with it would be a bit of heaven. The present lesson contains a few of its characteristic requirements.

1. Loving Our Enemies

The duty of loving our enemies is urged upon us. At this point the new law of the kingdom is set in contrast with the old law of Moses. The Mosaic law restricted love to one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18), and even went so far as to suggest hatred to one's enemy (Deut. 23:6).

Jesus broadened the command out so as to make it include enemies and enjoined his disciples to pray even for active and bitter enemies that persecuted them.

This is a hard grace to exercise, calling for a full and ripe Christian spirit, and there is pressing need for it in these days when the world has so recently been filled with "songs of hate" and is still in a state of unsettled problems and mutual recriminations and strife.

The great example in this, as in everything else, is God himself. If he requited his enemies as their rebellion deserves he would slay men by the million by the breath of his wrath. But he is long-suffering and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy.

In some ways he puts no distinction between the good and the evil. His sun rises and flings its splendor in equal prodigality upon the righteous and the

wicked, and his rain distills its blessing on the just in no richer or gentler grace than upon the unjust.

This impartial and generous goodness should fill our hearts and mark our behavior. If we simply love people of our kin and kind, those that love us and are congenial to us, we are no better than the people of the world and pagans, for they are adept in the arts of politeness, and even barbarians love their own kin.

The Christian should have some of the expansive love of God that takes in all people as his children and yearns to draw them to his heart.

Love to enemies is the spirit of good will that seeks to do the best thing for them and to remove old offenses and restore mutual faith and fellowship.

We can learn to do this by looking on every one as a child of God and a brother; then we can find some good in that one and some need we can supply, some service we can render; and by rendering this service, even unto sacrifice, and cherishing good will, we can acquire and intensify a spirit of love that will go out towards everybody and make the whole world our kindred.

2. The Golden Rule

This spirit is condensed and crystallized into the Golden Rule that fell from the lips of Jesus as one of the most precious jewels of the world's literature: "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

Something similar to this has been found in other writings, and Confucius stated it in a negative form, "Do not to others what you would not wish done to yourself." But this only forbids injuries and inculcates justice, whereas the rule of Jesus goes beyond justice to positive benevolence and enjoins all good acts towards others.

However men may have been struggling towards this truth Jesus gave it its first full and generous expression and thereby stamped it with his own spirit and originality. This lifts it out of the narrow and calculating spirit of regarding only our legal relations with others and sets it free in the golden atmosphere of Christian liberty and love.

The rule as thus expanded and glorified requires us to consider everyone in the light of brotherhood in which we are to extend to him every good that we could rightly wish him to bestow upon us.

If he is in any need that we can supply, growing out of ignorance or poverty or misfortune or sin or sorrow, we should deal with him as did the Good Samaritan with the wounded Jew, going to his aid, showing him our sympathy and providing for his necessities as our means permit.

If to one in trouble we are able to extend a sympathetic and helping hand, we should give what we would be glad to receive in like circumstances; if we are involved with another in a business transaction in which he falls into our power and we might press him hard and even drive him to ruin, we are to consider what we would think just and right if our relations were reversed.

If we are tempted to pass severe and sinister judgment upon another, we should temper our speech with the same restraint and kindness we would wish exercised towards us.

The same rule should be extended to corporations and churches and political opponents and parties and even to nations. Should one nation take advantage of another owing to its superior position or power to exact unjust and oppressive requital or reparations?

This rule, like all rules, calls for interpretation and adaptation to the peculiar conditions of each case. It cannot be pleaded against the enforcement of justice in our individual and social and international relations.

Generosity cannot be set up as a bar to justice, and yet even justice may be so administered that it hardens into injustice.

The spirit of this Golden Rule is just the spirit of universal good will and love, and if this spirit is breathed through our social relations it will temper and soften and brighten and glorify them into mutual brotherhood and blessing.

3. Mercy

The spirit of mercy is enjoined upon us. This is the Golden Rule carried to the extreme limit of its gracious application.

Mercy is forbearance from exacting justice and punishment from those who are in the wrong and are fallen into our power; it restrains us from pressing others to the wall when justice might sustain us in doing so; it forbids us to exercise a hard spirit towards others but calls for brotherly consideration and kindness.

Especially are we to cherish and exercise this spirit because we have all been spared and blessed by the mercy of God, and for us to receive of the grace of

his mercy and then turn in unrelenting justice upon others is base hardness of heart and despicable ingratitude.

Jesus set this forth in the parable of the Unjust Debtor, who had been forgiven by his lord of an immense debt amounting to fifteen millions of dollars, and then went out and forthwith seized by the throat a debtor who owed him about a millionth part of this sum and brutally choked him to the point of death, demanding instant payment.

This extreme case excites our indignation and abhorrence, but it is only a vivid illustration of what we really do when we are the recipients of God's merciful treatment as he might justly have cut us off in our sins, and then turn upon a fellow man, who cannot owe us a millionth part of what we owe God, and exact of him our pound of flesh or other harsh requirement.

Justice that knows no temper of mercy may be unjust and cruel as death, and there is no small amount of such justice in our social and business life.

Are not Christians and members of the same church often harsh in their mutual relations and even good haters? A perfect standard is held up to us at this point when we are admonished to be merciful "as your Father also is merciful." Were God to require of us one of a thousand, who could stand before him? And having freely received divine mercy we should exercise the same spirit towards our human kind.

4. Judging Others

"Judge not, and ye shall not be judged." This cannot be taken so literally as to make it exclude all judgment of one another, for such judgment is a social and moral necessity and it is one of the safeguards of our life.

It puts a wholesome restraint upon people to be just and careful in their judgments, and such social judgment acts as a social scavenger to keep our moral life clean.

But the spirit and purpose of the rule is plain: it warns us against unnecessary and unjust and censorious fault-finding; against a sharp tongue and a bitter spirit; against raising rumors and suspicions and sowing the air with sinister insinuations and suggestions.

It is easy to cast an aspersion or a shadow of doubt upon a person by a mere word or gesture or glance of the eye that will start rumors and grow into reports and become neighborhood gossip and scandal and cause alienations and

blight characters and do incalculable harm. Such judgment is malicious and wicked and should receive the strongest condemnation.

One who is given to such fault-finding is sure to have it come back upon him, and with what judgment he judges he shall be judged. A gossiping sharp tongue, a chronic censorious spirit will get what it gives, reap what it sows, and be condemned with the same judgment with which it condemns others.

5. Good Measure

The rule of giving and receiving forgiveness leads to the statement of a general social law that applies to all giving. As we give we shall receive, and the more generously we measure out our benefits to others, the more abundantly shall such blessings come back to us.

One who is gracious and courteous in his treatment of others will receive such treatment in generous measure himself; whereas one who is censorious and selfish in his social relations will be paid back in his own coin.

The people who complain of the lack of sociability in a church are pretty sure to be conspicuous themselves in their lack of such grace: they are cold and distant in their own manner and they get what they give; whereas people who are genial and warm and sunshiny themselves never complain of any lack of sociability in others because they draw it out of them. The icicle carries its own chill, and the sunbeam its own warmth.

Even in business generous dealing attracts trade and increases its own prosperity. Our own yardstick and bushel measure will be used in our dealings with others, and with what measure we mete it shall be measured to us again.

LESSON VIII.—NOVEMBER 19

JESUS THE FRIEND OF SINNERS

Jesus' Help for the Sinful and Sorrowful

Golden Text: This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I Tim. 1:15.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 51:1–10.

Reference Material Luke, 15:1–32.

Lesson Text: Luke, 7:37–48

37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

38 And stood at his feet behind *him* weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe *them* with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed *them* with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw *it*, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman *this is* that toucheth him; for she is a sinner.

40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.

41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that *he*, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped *them* with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loveth little.

48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. Simon the Pharisee.

2. A Fallen Woman.

3. Jesus and the Pharisee.

4. Jesus and the Fallen Woman.

This scene is full of human nature and divine grace. Two types of sinners stand sharply revealed and contrasted in its intense light, and the power of Jesus to save is illustrated.

1. Simon the Pharisee

Simon the Pharisee is the first figure in the scene. Being a Pharisee he had the ideas and instincts of his class.

Traditional and formal in religion, cold, critical and exclusive in spirit, he prided himself on his righteousness and maintained towards others an air of wide separation and lofty superiority. "Sinner," the last word he would ever have thought of applying to himself, was a contemptuous epithet he applied freely to others.

Jesus frequently came into collision with this class. He was a disappointment and an offense to them. His unworldliness and spirituality, his purity and meekness, his kingdom of brotherhood and love, thwarted all their ambitions and exasperated them beyond measure.

They soon viewed him with distrust and suspicion that grew into hostility and deadly hatred which at last fell upon him in murderous fury and crucified him on the cross.

Jesus, on the other hand, dared to face them and let loose upon them the most terrible lightnings of judgment that ever issued from his lips.

Simon belonged to this class, and yet he invited Jesus to dine at his house. This indicates a fairer state of mind towards the young Galilean rabbi than the prevailing Pharisaic attitude, a disposition to cultivate some acquaintance with him and see what manner of man he was; he was even open to the conviction that the Nazarene might be a prophet.

Yet, while opening his house to him, his hospitality was not unstinted and hearty, but was lacking in the gracious courtesies and even in some of the conventional civilities of the occasion.

The Pharisee did not greet his guest with a kiss and anoint him with oil and furnish him with water for the cleansing and cooling of his feet—marks of respect that would have been paid to an honored visitor. Simon accorded Jesus rather shabby treatment—a fact that Jesus did not fail to notice, and it drew from him at a fitting moment a quiet rebuke that the Pharisee must have keenly felt.

Such is the first figure in this scene: an orthodox formalist of eminent respectability, willing to show Jesus some attention, but

withholding from him the full measure of honor and careful to keep somewhat aloof from him.

2. A Fallen Woman

The second figure in the scene was that pitiable character, a fallen woman. Innocence, temptation, and fall had been her life history. Doubtless fair had been the bloom of her youth and beauty, subtle and seductive had been the wiles of her betrayer, and now bitter and despairing were the depths of her degradation. She was now a social outcast, and life had no more joy and hope for her.

But one day an event happened that changed the whole course of her unhappy life: she heard Jesus. His gracious personality and winning words must have produced a profound impression upon her. Possibly she heard him tell the scribes and Pharisees that publicans and harlots would go into the kingdom of God before them. His invitations and promises were the first words of hope and help that had fallen upon her ears since she had been cast out of society.

The germs of goodness were not yet dead in her heart, purity was still a beautiful vision which she longed to attain, and she resolved that she would see Jesus and express her devotion to him.

The feast of Simon gave her an opportunity. Oriental custom permitted uninvited persons to enter such a place, separated from the public court only by hanging curtains, and converse with the guests.

The fallen woman passed in unnoticed and stood behind Jesus, who like the others reclined at the table on a couch with his feet extended behind. The woman had an alabaster jar of ointment, a costly fragrant unguent that was very soothing and agreeable when applied to the body. It was her intention to anoint Jesus with this precious ointment, an act which was an extravagant honor according to their social custom.

When, however, she found herself in his presence she was overcome with emotion and burst into tears. Her sense of sin and shame and the thought of his purity and pardoning grace opened the fountain of her heart and flowed forth in a flood of penitence and faith. Her tears fell like rain upon the feet of Jesus. With her loosened hair she wiped off the stains, kissed his feet, and anointed them with her fragrant ointment.

All this seems foreign to our sense of propriety and delicacy, but it was in accordance with Oriental custom and expression of respect.

These are the two contrasted figures in this scene: at the one extreme a Pharisee, self-righteous in himself and cool and critical towards Jesus; and at the other a fallen woman pouring out her penitence in tears and showing her devotion to Jesus.

3. Jesus and the Pharisee

How was this act of the woman regarded and received? The Pharisee looked at it from his point of view. He thought within himself that, if this man were a prophet, he would have perceived that the woman who touched him was a disreputable character off the street.

How the proud Pharisee recoiled in horror from that polluting touch! Not to touch others or be touched by them, to keep himself separate and aloof from others, this was the Pharisee's ruling principle and passion.

We are ever in danger of cherishing the same exclusive and selfish spirit. There is a way in which we are to keep ourselves separate from sinners: we are to have no fellowship or sympathy with them in their sin. But we are not to withdraw from them and look down upon them in a spirit of self-righteous superiority.

The hard cold stare that "sinners" sometimes receive from the "righteous" repels and embitters them. Fallen women are especially subject to this unchristian and cruel treatment.

We are all fallen sinners, and instead of recoiling from the touch of others and trampling them down, we should clasp hands and help one another up.

Jesus showed Simon a more excellent way. "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee," was the gentle introduction with which Jesus opened his rebuke. The Pharisee was ready to hear it, and said, "Master, say on."

The parable of the Two Debtors illustrated the principle that Jesus had to present. One debtor owed a lender five hundred pence and another owed him fifty, and the banker forgave them both. "Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?"

The Pharisee answered carelessly as though it were a matter in which he had no personal interest, "I suppose that he to whom he forgave most."

Jesus now had his host in his power and applied the principle of the parable to the matter in hand. He pointed out how he had entered Simon's house and had been received with scant courtesy as no water had been offered him for his

feet, and his head had not been anointed with oil; but in contrast with this cool reception the woman had washed and kissed his feet and anointed them with precious ointment.

He therefore declared her sins forgiven, and drew the conclusion that she loved much: and then added with evident reference to Simon, "but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

The principle is that one's sense of the depth of his sin and of the fullness and blessing of his pardon will determine the warmth and wealth of his love.

On this principle we ought all to love God and Jesus our Lord with a fathomless depth and fullness of love, for we have had forgiven a debt of sin that is infinitely beyond our power to pay or to conceive.

At this point Simon drops out of the story and we hear nothing more of him.

4. Jesus and the Fallen Woman

The woman now becomes the central figure in the scene. The Pharisee has been silenced and passes into deserved oblivion, and Jesus now turns to the penitent.

On several occasions Jesus came into contact with women of this class, and the tact and tenderness, the grace and charm of his manner of treating them is one of the most beautiful things in the gospels. He never lectured them on the social enormity and shame of their sin and humiliated them before others, after the manner of some reformers; he did not put a black blot on this sin and make it stand out glaringly as the worst transgression in the whole catalogue of sins; on the contrary he treated these sinners with unusual kindness and courtesy, and it was the scribes and Pharisees, the doctors of divinity and the church people of the day, that he branded as the worst sinners and declared that harlots and publicans should go into the kingdom of God before them.

His standards of weights and measures for estimating the relative guilt of sins were very different from our social scales and judgments.

We judge by outward rules of social conventionality and are dreadfully afraid of being caught in the coils of social scandals, whereas he judged by inward scales of the spirit and thought that self-righteousness and pride and selfishness are worse than all the violations of the artificial decalogue of social custom.

Here is a vital point where we need to make spiritual discriminations and judge righteous judgment.

So turning from the Pharisee to the fallen woman Jesus simply said, "Thy sins are forgiven."

Instantly the guests began to say, "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" That was a question that on other occasions troubled the Jews, especially the Pharisees. They believed that God only could forgive sin, and in this they were right.

But they were wrong in their application of their principle, for they did not know, as they should have known, that Jesus was the Son of God with power on earth to forgive sin.

Jesus, unmindful of their critical thought, said again unto the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

Here is salvation in its simplicity and its saving power. A fallen woman comes up out of the depths of her sin and stands penitent in the presence of Jesus; no words pass between them, only a few simple acts show her penitence and devotion to him; proud Pharisees are there to censure any recognition of such a person: but Jesus pronounces her sins forgiven and sends her away in peace. The soul that came to him so vile went away washed clean.

Again we stand in wonder at the tactful and fine way in which he dealt with this woman. No other class of sinners are so cut off from human sympathy and help, are so hard to reach and are considered so hopeless.

Jesus treated them with the utmost frankness and freeness, and all his relations with them were marked with the most perfect delicacy and refinement, wisdom and tact, sympathy and love. He attracted them to himself by his grace, melted them into penitence, and sent them away purified and peaceful. As he saved these lost ones, so he can save all sinners; and in the same spirit are we to seek to save others.

LESSON IX.—NOVEMBER 26

JESUS THE GREAT MISSIONARY

Jesus the Ideal Missionary

Golden Text: The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Luke, 19:10.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 47.

Reference Material: Matt. 4:23; 9:35–38.

Lesson Text: Luke, 8:1–3, 26–33, 38–39

And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve *were* with him,

2 And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils,

3 And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

26 ¶ And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee.

27 And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in *any* house, but in the tombs.

28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not.

29 (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)

30 And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.

31 And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep.

32 And there was there a herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them.

33 Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.

38 Now the man, out of whom the devils were departed, besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying,

39 Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *A Missionary Tour.*
2. *The Gadarene Demoniac.*
3. *A Cry for Help.*
4. *A Great Deliverance.*
5. *A Sad Sequel.*

The two main incidents in this lesson did not occur in chronological sequence, as the accounts show, but taken together they serve to exemplify the work of Jesus as a missionary.

1. A Missionary Tour

This missionary tour of Jesus will illustrate other journeys he made from his headquarters at Capernaum out through the region of Galilee. He took his twelve disciples with him so that they were being trained under his leadership for the wider work they were to do after his departure as they went out to the Gentiles and started the kingdom of God over the world.

He went from village to village "preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God," this kingdom consisting of both doctrines and deeds, doctrines concerning God and man, sin and salvation, and deeds of healing and forgiveness, both doctrines and deeds being truly "glad tidings" to sinful and suffering people.

This kingdom has come down to us and we are still proclaiming it and it is making good its glad tidings in every land and home and heart where it is being truly received and lived.

It is strikingly significant that Jesus was accompanied and supported in this tour by certain women, one of them being Mary Magadelene, who had been healed of evil spirits, and another being the wife of an officer at Herod's court, showing that the gospel was already penetrating into the upper circles of society.

Not only have women been foremost in accepting Jesus as Saviour and living according to his gospel, but they are at this day specially prominent in supporting missions both at home and abroad; and our great missionary boards have their springs back in countless

women's missionary societies in local churches that send steady streams of money into their treasuries.

2. The Gadarene Demoniac

"The country of the Gadarenes" was on the southeastern side of the Lake of Galilee. At one point the shore rises steeply up from the lake, and the overhanging hill contains many ancient tombs cut in the limestone rock.

Jesus at the conclusion of the series of parables which he delivered from a fishing boat crossed the lake with his disciples in a storm in which he calmed the sea.

As he stepped upon the shore he was seen by a man in the distance who immediately started towards him. This man was possessed of an unclean spirit and was a violent madman. He made his home in the graveyard and wandered about in the mountains. No fetters could hold him.

Often he was caught and bound with handcuffs and chains, but he would break these as though they were spider threads and, laughing at his captors with maniacal glee, he would be off like the wind. In his paroxysms he would cut himself with sharp stones and often would the stillness of the midnight be pierced by his wild shrieks.

He was the terror of the neighborhood. Everybody was afraid of him and was ready to help chain and beat him: but nobody loved him.

This man with an unclean spirit is a vivid and true picture of man in his sin.

In some form evil is in his heart and acts upon him as this evil spirit did upon this Gadarene. It leads a man to dwell among the tombs of death.

The sinner is constantly at some point violating the laws of life, and this is a cause of death; and in his thoughts and passions and acts he is dwelling among unclean and unholy things. He cannot be bound with fetters and chains: not with self-control, nor with the principles of righteousness, nor even at times with human laws. No man can tame the human heart, for it is desperately wicked.

And often we see the sinner day and night cutting himself with sharp stones. Some sins are knives that do bloody work on a man's life. Intemperance slashes every fiber of the body, and lying and hatred and murder are dreadful stones.

Every sin cuts into the substance of the soul. And thus it is literally true that the sinner is hacking and tearing himself to pieces. "Thou has destroyed thyself" (Hosea, 13:9).

3. A Cry for Help

The demons cried out to Jesus, recognizing him as the Son of God, to be let alone, but the man himself had hope of deliverance as when "he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshiped him" (Mark, 5:6). We do not know how much the poor fellow knew about Jesus, but he realized his own hopeless condition and came to him in the hope of obtaining some relief. This is the first state of mind and step in salvation.

Just as that demonized man could not expel the devils from his soul, so the sinner cannot rid himself of his evil heart.

The leopard cannot change its spots, and no man can change his own nature. He may change outside appearances, but not inner realities. Though a man may cut off his bad habits and refine his manners, yet the old disposition is there and devils are in him still.

One of the certainties of our spiritual condition is that we cannot forgive and cleanse ourselves and are helpless in our sin.

Yet we are not helpless in the sense that we have nothing to do and can do nothing, for there is something that we can and must do: we can go to Jesus.

He has stepped upon the shore of our life and stands in full view so that we can go to him if we will. It does not take perfect faith or even much faith to start towards him, and if we turn to him he will meet us, and we shall find in him One who is mighty to save.

4. A Great Deliverance

"He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man." This was the reception Jesus gave the demoniac. He spoke with mercy to the man, freeing him from this terrible bondage; and he spoke with judgment upon the unclean spirit so that it quailed and was terrified. He did not judge the man, but only the devil that was in the man.

Jesus did not come to condemn the world, for the world was condemned already, but only that the world through him might be saved. God is not our enemy, watching and waiting to catch us in a trap that he may wreak ven-

geance on us, but he is our Father who loves us and sent his Son to say to the evil spirit in every one of us, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit."

This is the great need and blessing of life: not that we may get rich or attain to our worldly ambition, but that we may have hearts out of which Jesus has cast every evil spirit, making us free and pure.

Then came the strange request of the unclean spirit, whose name was Legion, for devils love company and go in droves so that all evil thoughts and habits flock together and make a common nest in the same heart, that they might be permitted to take possession of a herd of swine that were feeding up on the hillside.

This permission was given, and when the unclean spirits had entered into the swine, the herd became violently mad and two thousand pigs rushed down the steep slope into the sea and were drowned.

What are we to think of this occurrence? The destruction of these swine has been framed into a charge against Jesus. It has been said that he had no right to destroy other people's property in this way.

But in answer to this several things may be said. For one thing, swine were forbidden among Jews and these Gadarenes had no right to have them. They were carrying on a prohibited business and their goods were confiscated.

Further, Jesus did not positively send the devils into the swine, but only gave them leave to follow their own choice; he suffered them to go just as he permits many other evil spirits and evil men to have freedom of action, however much they may abuse it.

But, above all, the objection forgets or denies the lordship of Christ over men and devils and swine and all things. God may destroy two thousand swine by a pestilence or a flood and no one may challenge his right; and in the person and work of his Son he may do the same thing.

This destruction of property was an instance of the loss that often attends progress. The prohibition of any wrong that is entrenched behind invested capital, as of the liquor traffic, may cause immense loss.

Yet society has the right and exercises the right to stop the evil business, without compensation, though in casting out the evil spirits two thousand swine may be choked in the sea.

5. A Sad Sequel

The loss of the swine was followed by a sad but not altogether strange sequel.

The keepers fled into the city and told what had happened, and out came the people, including the owners of the swine, to see. What did they see? They saw the demoniac sitting clothed and in his right mind. Can we imagine the blessedness which must have filled his soul? He had been tormented and driven about among the tombs, a raving maniac cutting himself with sharp stones. Now he sat in the full possession of his mind, a free man! It must have been something like coming out of a wild and frightful dream into a clear and peaceful state of consciousness.

One would have thought that the sight would have filled the Gadarenes with a sense of relief and of joy and that they would have welcomed Jesus to their side of the lake. But no! they ordered him out of their country! him who had saved the bedeviled maniac and had freed them from a frightful scourge and could have blessed them all, they prayed to depart.

Why was this? Partly it was fear of a prophet who had such power over devils and beasts, but chiefly they wanted to get rid of him when they were told "also concerning the swine." A man had been saved, but two thousand swine had been lost!

The balance sheet of this transaction did not balance, for what was a demoniac man whom nobody cared for in comparison with two thousand swine that commanded a high price in the market?

They did not want a saviour in their country who saved men at the expense of pigs. Let the devils have the man, but save the hogs! And for fear that he might save more men at the cost of more pigs they ordered him out of their coasts.

This is the logic of all lines of evil business that are destroyed or interfered with by the Christian spirit and the progress of the kingdom of God.

This was long the logic of the liquor traffic. Those interested in this business would compute and show us how many millions of dollars were invested in it, what vast quantities of grain it bought from our farmers and how many thousands of men it employed. And then they cried out, These temperance fanatics are going to destroy all this big business and wreck the country. Let us order them out of our coasts! We can stand the misery and the crime, but

don't touch the saloon. Let the devils of strong drink have the boys, but save the pigs!

A Christian nation has turned in wrath against such logic, but it is still doing business in other lines. We pray Jesus to depart from us whenever we do not give him room to remain.

LESSON X.—DECEMBER 3

JESUS SENDING OUT MISSIONARIES

Our Home Mission Work

Golden Text: The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest. Luke, 10:2.

Devotional Reading: Matt. 28:16–20.

Reference Material: Matt. 10:1–42; John, 17:17–21; 20:21.

Lesson Text: Luke, 10:1–11, 17

After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.
2 Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers *are* few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.
3 Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.
4 Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way.
5 And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace *be* to this house.
6 And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again.
7 And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.
8 And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you:
9 And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.
10 But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say,
11 Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

17 ¶ And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Disciples Sent Forth in Pairs.
2. Personal Directions.
3. Their Work.
4. Procedure if Rejected.
5. A Joyful Return.

In the preceding lesson Jesus went out with his twelve disciples and also with some women on a missionary tour; in this lesson seventy disciples are sent out alone on the same work.

There comes a time when the scholar must proceed in his studies without the instruction of the teacher, and the apprentice must do his work without the guidance of the master workman.

The same principle applies in Christian service. We come to Jesus to be with him so as to be taught his will and way and acquire his spirit, and then we must go from him and in a measure serve alone in our appointed field of work. And yet the Master is with us always even unto the end of the world.

1. Disciples Sent Forth in Pairs

The seventy disciples were chosen and sent out in pairs into the cities and villages to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. Such preparatory work would greatly facilitate his work by acquainting the people with his kingdom and putting them in an expectant and receptive mood.

It is common with us, when we are about to inaugurate an evangelistic campaign, to prepare the way for it by services conducted by the pastors, and then the special evangelists can find the meetings ready for them.

We all can be forerunners to prepare the way for Christ. All our teaching and preaching and personal influence put the minds and hearts of others in such a state of knowledge and receptivity that the Holy Spirit can work upon them.

These disciples were sent forth two by two, for such workers can do best by working together. They sustain and encourage each other, and often they can divide the work so as to save time and increase their efficiency.

Missionaries in foreign lands surrounded by the darkness of heathenism are in special need of mutual companionship and support.

A pressing reason given by Jesus for sending forth these missionaries was that "the harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few." Jesus looked out over the populous region of Galilee and Perea and saw it swarming with human beings that were a vast harvest for his kingdom. Over the same region looked the Roman governor and saw in it only a harvest of taxes.

The field of the kingdom now has widened out until it takes in the world, and all its millions are a harvest that belongs to Christ. The fences and barriers that once shut this field in are now down, and we can go anywhere and begin to reap.

The scarcity of laborers impressed Jesus with the need of more reapers, and he taught his disciples to pray that they might be sent, and then he bade them go themselves, thus teaching them to answer their own prayer, a principle in relation to prayer that runs all through the Bible and through our Christian experience.

How urgent is the call to-day for laborers, as all our boards and fields call for more ministers and missionaries to go out and take possession of the vast fields that are now ready for reapers.

2. Personal Directions

Personal directions were delivered to these disciples. Warning was given them that they were going out as lambs among wolves. They were not lured into this service with the prospect and promise of easy work and a large salary, but were plainly shown the rough and dangerous road they were to travel. Jewish bigotry and Roman oppression would beset them, and they would need to take their lives in their hands.

Missionary work is still dangerous business in some lands, and it calls for some spirit of bravery and sacrifice everywhere.

Lambs among wolves—their innocence was to be their protection. They were not to load themselves down with baggage and means of comfort, but go just as they were. A short journey through the neighboring villages did not call for much equipment, and each day would supply its own need.

This of course is no hard and fast rule for all occasions, and on another occasion (Luke 22:35 36) Jesus gave different directions. Missionaries and ministers are to be governed by common sense and adapt their arrangements to their needs.

On entering a house they were to greet it with the usual salutation, equivalent to saying, "Good morning," or "Good day." Thus they were not to break in abruptly with their message, saying "How is your soul?" but they were to begin with the ordinary courtesies of life and let these naturally lead on to more serious business.

Religion is so closely related to all the affairs of life that there is no difficulty in introducing it in connection with any subject. Jesus asked the woman of Samaria for a drink of water and was then soon talking with her about the water of life.

If they were given a welcome in a house they were to remain in it during their stay in that place and were not to lose time in changing their boarding place.

Even their table manners were a matter of sufficient importance to be made the subject of remark by Jesus. Twice he tells them to eat such things as are set before them. They were not to be exacting and particular about their entertainment and thus make themselves disagreeable, but they were to win good will by their quiet behavior and appreciative spirit.

Guests—even ministers—have been known to make their presence unpleasant and annoying by their irritating and offensive ways, and in the case of such guests the relief of their going exceeds the welcome of their coming.

Beautiful behavior is part of Christian adornment and should be exhibited by every follower of Jesus, but especially by those who go before to prepare the way for him.

These disciples were not to pay for their entertainment, and yet they were not beggars, for no pay was expected or would be received in the East for entertainment; and, besides, they were rendering service for more than they received, and "the labourer is worthy of his hire."

3. Their Work

They were to begin their work by healing the sick. Their first word was not to be an abrupt announcement of a message which the people would not quickly understand, but they were to begin on a lower level where the people already stood.

Healing was something that everybody would appreciate, and it would open the way for the deeper healing of the soul. Bodily disease was everywhere prevalent among the people, and it was only one symptom of the root disease of sin: cutting off this branch might enable them to strike deeper and sever the tap root.

This direction is the beginning of medical missions. Heathenism everywhere shows its helplessness in the presence of disease, and our Christian science and skill are ever going before the gospel and preparing the way for it. Good works of all kinds give the gospel a kindly aspect and make it acceptable to the people.

The institutional church that ministers in many ways to human needs reaches many people with the gospel that would otherwise never enter a

church door. We should embrace every opportunity to help people and thus we may win them into the kingdom.

For these disciples were ever to accompany their healing with the message, "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." The bodily healing was not an end in itself, but a means to a higher end.

Healing, good as it is, is a small blessing to confer on our human kind compared with the infinitely greater blessing of the kingdom of God. This kingdom means order and obedience and blessing from the center out to the whole circumference of life.

Get the kingdom of God into the hearts of men, and all things else will come right. Disease and all manner of evil will retire before it as darkness before light, and health and holiness and happiness will come.

4. Procedure if Rejected

What was to be done by these disciples if their message was rejected? If on entering a house "a son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again." The effect of their presence in any house or city depended on what they encountered: their peace would bring peace to the friendly and would recoil from the hostile.

The effect of every agent or cause depends on the receptive nature of its object as well as upon its own nature. The result of the sculptor's chisel depends on whether it strikes on sandstone or on marble.

The result of the preaching of the gospel everywhere depends on the nature of the hearts on which it falls: to some it is a savor of life unto life, and to others a savor of death unto death.

When their message was rejected in any city these disciples were to go out into the streets and wipe off the dust of their feet against it, an Oriental symbol of complete separation from its guilt. They had done their duty in their rapid tour, and the city had to bear its own responsibility. This act of wiping the dust off their feet did not add anything to the city's condemnation: it was only an outer expression of the inner fact.

Our condemnation is just as sure, if we reject the gospel, whether or not it is marked by any such outward expression. We cannot reject this saving truth and then be as good as ever: some guilt

has been incurred and some worth has been lost out of the soul.

Yet even in condemning a city the disciples were to give it a final assurance that the kingdom of God was come nigh to it. The possibility of repentance is always left with the unbeliever.

5. A Joyful Return

"And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." Such results from their preaching were highly encouraging to them as proving that the gospel of their Master was the power of God unto salvation to all them that believed and even had might to subdue the spirits of evil into subjection.

This strengthened them for further service and especially did it prepare them for the great trial that was to come upon them in the crucifixion of their Lord that would seem to turn all their faith into falsity and all their light into the blackness of darkness.

We seem to catch a somewhat too optimistic note in their joy as though they thought that the whole victory over evil was now won and that henceforth they would have a straight and smooth path to triumph.

But dark days were yet to come and the greatest darkness that ever fell upon Jesus and his cause was already looming up on the horizon. Yet they passed through this storm masterfully and then were ready for all trials, believing they would lead to final victory.

We also have reasons to rejoice in our work, for our eyes "have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord," and we believe that we are ever passing through the shadows of the world into the fuller coming of the kingdom.

LESSON XI.—DECEMBER 10

STORY OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Jesus' Plan for Saving Society

Golden Text: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Lev. 19:18.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 41:1–4, 10–13.

Reference Material: Luke, 14:1–14.

Lesson Text: Luke, 10:25–37

25 ¶ And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?
26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?
27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.
28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.
29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?
30 And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead.
31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him*, and passed by on the other side.
33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*.
34 And went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.
36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?
37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***A Good Question with a Sinister Purpose.***
2. ***A Correct Biblical Answer.***
3. ***Another Unnecessary Question with a Wrong Motive.***
4. ***An Answer in a Superb Parable.***
5. ***Go and Do Likewise.***

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the finest jewels in the treasury of parables that Jesus left to the world; and as the pearl is secreted out of the irritation and suffering of the shell-fish, so this precious parable was drawn from Jesus by an artful attack upon him by one of the scribes.

Never did Jesus show up to better advantage than in these dialectical efforts of his enemies to catch him in a trap, and this parable is the product of one of the keenest and subtlest of these hostile schemes.

1. A Good Question with a Sinister Purpose

A certain lawyer stood up and tempted him, saying, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

There are good points in this question. It is an inquiry worthy of our deepest interest and highest effort. It strikes through all outer circumstances into the inmost core of existence and lays hold of life itself; and it is not concerned simply with the passing forms and needs of life, but it looks into the future and asks for life eternal.

Compared with this question, all the current questions of the day are as dust in the balance.

The question realizes that something must be done to inherit eternal life. This life is not a natural birthright of the soul, but must be obtained; and it will not come itself, but must be secured through personal effort. It is right to be interested in the eternal welfare of others, but no one is prepared for this until he has obtained eternal life in himself.

The question is also put to the right teacher. Jesus is a Master who has authority on earth to answer this question; and to whom else can we go, for he only has words of eternal life?

Yet good as is the question, there are some unfavorable points in the questioner. He was a lawyer, a teacher of the divine law, and it was his duty to know the answer. He was either ignorant of his own business, or else he was feigning ignorance, possibly for some sinister purpose.

This latter supposition is confirmed by the statement that he tempted Jesus. Evidently he was trying to entangle the Nazarene and catch him by a cunning device. He was really seeking, not instruction, but controversy.

Everything depends on the purpose for which and the spirit in which we ask a question. If we are sincere inquirers we shall

find the way; but if we are trying to ensnare others we are likely to get lost ourselves. Let us ask great questions as honest inquirers and the answer will be forthcoming and we shall find eternal life.

2. A Correct Biblical Answer

Jesus answered the lawyer's question by asking him another. The great Teacher was a master of dialectics, and no captious critic ever tried to catch him without getting caught himself.

"What is written in the law?" There was a keen but quiet thrust in that question. The lawyer was referred to the law. He was shown to be ignorant of his own profession and sent back to his own book. He did not need to ask this question, for he already had the means of answering it.

It was not more light that he needed, but more use of the light he had. If we knew what is written in our Bible we would be saved from many questions and perplexities. We are often searching for truth far off when the commandment is nigh us, even in our hearts. There is enough written for us already, and we do not need more light but a clearer eye to see the light we have.

"How readest thou?" Another home thrust. It was this lawyer's profession to interpret the law, and yet he was missing its main point.

How we read is as important as what we read. We can read truth so as to pervert it into error and turn its life into death.

We can read the Bible systematically, meditatively, prayerfully and obediently, so as to grasp its truth and absorb its spirit; or we can read it hurriedly, superficially, thoughtlessly, skeptically, and get nothing out of it. If we would read deeper into the Bible we would see more in it and get more out of it and have fewer perplexing questions to trouble us.

The lawyer, roused to some sense of the position in which his question had put himself, answered out of the law. His answer was taken from the Old Testament and is the same answer that is given in the New.

The answer makes the root of eternal life love for God. We live by love and out of no other root can life grow. Nothing else can be right until we get right with God. No point on the circumference can be right as long as the center is wrong. This love for God should be fervent, strong and intelligent.

And having found God, it must next find man. The closer we are to God the nearer we are to one another and every man becomes our neighbor.

So spoke the lawyer; and Jesus commended his answer and bade him do this and assured him he would have eternal life. Thus responsibility was driven home upon the lawyer. He knew more than he did. His creed was right, but his conduct was wrong.

We all know enough to save us. It is because our obedience lags so far behind our conscience that we get lost. If we will only do what we know we shall live.

3. Another Unnecessary Question with a Wrong Motive

The consistent course for the lawyer to have followed, had he been a sincere inquirer, would have been to begin the practice of his own doctrine.

But this was not the point he had in view, and he now gave another twist to the argument. "But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?"

This was another unnecessary question with a wrong motive. The question was unnecessary because he was a professional student and expositor of a Bible which told him the truth and gave him broad views on this point.

But Jewish pride and exclusiveness had made "neighbour" a narrow word that never got very far from home. Its breadth of human sympathy had been contracted into selfish caste.

The question, "Who is my neighbour?" is likely to be the old heresy of Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The man that begins to ask this question has already lost touch with humanity and contracted his horizon to a narrow circle. It is this question that splits society into classes and arrays races and ranks against one another.

Every human being is our neighbor. That poor man, that tempted man, that black man, that heathen man, that far-off man: he is your neighbor.

The purpose of this question was even worse than its form: "willing to justify himself." This, then, was the poisoned point of his question. He was not seeking the way of life that he might walk in it, but he was aiming at justifying himself. The argument of Jesus was driving him into painful and humiliating self-condemnation, and he made desperate efforts at self-justification.

Of how many excuses and subterfuges and lies is self-justification the root? The sinner becomes ingenious and expert at standing up before conscience and

God and justifying himself. "I have done as well as could be expected." "I am no worse than other men."

Coming before God in this spirit, we shall not find the way of life. Self-justification is only wrapping more closely around us the filthy rags of our self-righteousness. We shall find life only when we come self-condemned, crying, " God be merciful to me a sinner."

4. An Answer in a Superb Parable

It was at this point that Jesus introduced his superb parable. The steep rocky road running down from Jerusalem to Jericho was familiar to his hearers and may have been in plain view. The narrow path ran through defiles full of caves and hiding-places that were infested with robbers.

Down this road came a solitary traveler peacefully pursuing his journey, when, suddenly, highwaymen seized him, robbed and stripped him, beat him, and left him lying unconscious and bleeding on the stones.

A priest came down the same road, and, seeing the wounded man, crossed over to the other side and unconcernedly passed by. A Levite did the same thing.

There is always another side on the way of life along which we can slip and escape many of the burdens of our fellow-men.

Priest and Levite, minister and deacon, the professional religionists, had no time or sympathy for a robbed and wounded man; there was no money in his pocket for them and he was not their neighbor.

Then came a Samaritan, a layman, a man of another race and religion, and a man with whom the Jews were at enmity; when he saw the wounded Jew, he had compassion on him and treated him as a brother. He bound up his wounds and then "set him on his own beast."

This pregnant little touch in the narrative is the very heart of the parable, the milk of human kindness in the core of the hard rough story. The Samaritan put the wounded Jew in his own place, treated him as his own self. His own comfort was in having this stranger comfortable. His consciousness was of the other man. "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." "In all their affliction he was afflicted."

This is the essence of Samaritanism, the very spirit of the gospel and the blood-red heart of the cross.

This is the wonderful answer that Jesus made to the question, "Who is my neighbour?" This is the daring answer he gave to the Jews, holding up before them a despised Samaritan as an example, rebuking their formal selfish hypocrisy, and showing them by one counted by them a heretic and a heathen what true religion is.

5. Go and Do Likewise

Having drawn this picture Jesus now submitted to the lawyer which of these three was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves.

The great Teacher made the truth so plain that he was willing to leave the answer to his captious critic himself. Christianity grounds itself down on such plain and practical principles of life and duty that it dares to submit its reasonableness and obligation to our own minds and consciences.

And the lawyer answered, "He that shewed mercy on him." Shut up so closely to the truth, he could hardly go wrong. The insincere questioner was himself at last forced to tell the truth.

Yet Jesus had told him nothing that he did not already know. He simply put the case before him so as to draw the truth out of his own knowledge and conscience. Again it is impressed upon us that it is not new truth we need but a clearer apprehension of and and a better obedience to the truth we have.

The Master's parting word to the lawyer is also his command to us: "Go, and do thou likewise." This was the method and spirit of Jesus, and this should be the spirit in which we deal with people, especially the burdened and wounded and lost. Only this spirit will save society.

LESSON XII.—DECEMBER 17

JESUS AMONG FRIENDS AND FOES

Christ's Methods of Dealing with People

Golden Text: Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you. John, 15:14.

Devotional Reading: John, 15:8–16.

Reference Material: Luke, 2:34–35.

Lesson Text: Luke, 10:38–42; 11:42–44, 53–54

38 ¶ Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.
39 And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.
40 But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.
41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:
42 But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

42 But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.
43 Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.
44 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over *them* are not aware *of them*.

53 And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge *him* vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things:
54 Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Martha the Active.
2. Mary the Meditative.
3. Strained Relations.
4. A Gentle Rebuke.
5. The One Thing Needful.

This is the first recorded visit of Jesus to that house which, more than any other place during his ministry, seems to have been to him a home. Here he

found hospitality and rest and friendship, towards this place his tired feet frequently turned, and out of it he went to his cross.

He had no home of his own, and yet his spirit is making all homes better.

Two sisters were in this home who were strongly contrasted in character and conduct, and their behavior on this occasion presents an interesting study.

1. Martha the Active

Martha appears to have been the elder of the two sisters and the head of the family, and on this occasion she received Jesus into her house.

The coming of this notable guest with his disciples into her home was no ordinary event, and she proposed to celebrate it worthily with a feast. As we find her serving at another feast outside her home (John, 12:2), we may infer that she was an expert in the culinary line and serving was her forte.

She evidently thought that the most effective way of entertaining her guests was to feed them, and presently great preparations were going on to this end.

The busy bustling Martha was soon in a flutter and flurry of excitement, and the whole culinary department of the household was astir with activity. There was a clatter of dishes in the kitchen, a running and rushing about through the house, and a general air of haste and confusion.

Soon "Martha was cumbered about much serving," drawn about in different directions, distracted, as the word means. She had set about preparing too large and elaborate a dinner, and the affair was getting beyond her power and patience. A multitude of details was bewildering her, and she knew not which way to turn.

In the meantime Jesus was discoursing in that same house on things of the highest import in words of heavenly wisdom, and Martha, immersed in the affairs of the kitchen, was missing a golden opportunity.

She is a type of an active and practical person, overloaded with work and worry, always busy to the point of distraction, but busy on the lower side of life, buried in the kitchen or office and seldom rising into the higher regions of thought, superabundant in labors but deficient in meditation.

Such people, it need not be said, are very useful and necessary in the world. They prepare our meals and keep the home running, they are energetic in business, they are active in the temporal af-

fairs of the church, they drive things and make them go all along the line.

At times they may seem to overdo things in their bustling activity and fussy ways, but we must give them great credit for their service, and while we are in the parlor enjoying "the feast of reason and the flow of soul" we should not forget that they are out in the kitchen preparing for us a wholesome and appetizing meal.

2. *Mary the Meditative*

In marked contrast with the action of Martha on this occasion was the behavior of Mary. She "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word." Her more passive and meditative nature drew her to him and made her a rapt listener to his wonderful speech.

She sat at his feet in lowly humility, and she heard his word as one eager to know the ways of the kingdom of God. Truth, in her view, must precede and guide conduct, the heart must muse in meditation before it can wisely pour itself out in action.

She was not sitting there in lazy idleness to escape duty in the kitchen, or in a state of dreamy passivity, but her mind was active and masterful as she meditated upon the words of Jesus, and she was gathering a deeper and richer spirit for the fuller service of life. She was sitting at the feet of Jesus that she might rise up stronger and more serviceable than ever.

Mary, then, is a type of a meditative person, one who draws apart at times from busy activities for reading, meditation and communion with God.

Such persons may sit at the feet of profound thinkers who have written imperishable words in the world's literature, and from them they absorb great thoughts and fresh inspiration; or they draw apart with friends and in confidential fellowship they enlarge and enrich one another's souls; or they sit at the feet of Jesus as he speaks out of the Word of God and they hold communion with him and with the Father through prayer, and their hearts burn as they muse on high and holy things.

Such meditation is the deepest and richest preparation for action. Thought must ever precede conduct, we must know before we can do.

The tree must silently gather nourishment out of the soil and moisture out of the air and vital beams out of the sun and subtle radiations from all the stars in the sky before it can bloom, and we must

drink in spiritual influences through all the roots and leaves of our being before we can ripen and bear fruit.

3. Strained Relations

At this point occurred an interruption that bordered close upon a quarrel between these two sisters. Martha had more on her hands than she could manage, and, thinking herself deserted and imposed upon by her sister, she grew impatient and irritable, and presently she gave way to her temper and created a painful scene.

Stepping up to Jesus with a decided quick movement that strongly suggested her impatience she said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me."

This curt utterance, which tries to be respectful and yet every word of which quivers with suppressed anger, was a stinging rebuke to Mary that must have made her face flash scarlet with astonishment and shame; and it dared to let its lash fall even on Jesus himself.

Mary may have been somewhat derelict in the matter of helping to prepare this dinner, and then again she may not have been open to this charge. She may have done her part in helping her sister up to a certain point, or she may have thought so elaborate a feast was unnecessary, or she may have been so drawn by the talk of Jesus that, pausing a moment to listen, she was soon unwittingly absorbed in his words.

However this may have been, Martha's indignant rebuke shows how people of different temperaments are likely to misunderstand and blame one another.

The active Martha could not appreciate the meditative Mary. She thought her sister was neglecting duty and shirking her work in order that she might sit in dreamy languidness and ease; and, besides, there was little use in merely listening to talk anyway, especially while a great dinner was being prepared and all hands were needed in the kitchen.

No doubt also Mary thought that Martha was too exacting and fussy about that dinner and that it would have been better for her sister to be listening to those wonderful words of Jesus than to be out working and worrying in the kitchen to get up a great feast when a simple repast was all that was needed.

There is a tendency for active practical people and passive meditative people to fall out.

The pushing hustler that always wants to take right hold of things and drive them through may have small respect for the thinker who sits and reads and meditates; he may suppose that such a man is of no use in the world and does not earn his salt. The thinker also may underrate the practical worker as a shallow and sordid man, and so he may fail to appreciate his real worth to the world.

We should all know that it takes different kinds of people to make the world, different types and temperaments to blend their varying individualities into a stronger and richer unity, and this should make us broad and fair and kind in judging one another.

4. A Gentle Rebuke

How did Jesus answer this rebuke and demand of Martha? He did not take sides with Martha against Mary, but rather took Mary's part and gently rebuked Martha herself: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Jesus did not condemn Martha for her activity in preparing the dinner: such work was necessary and good. Active service is ever important and deserving of praise and reward. But Jesus did intimate to Martha that her activity was one-sided and lacked a vital part.

She was putting the emphasis on the wrong place and was overlooking something immensely more important: she was intent on the feast for the body and was missing the feast for the soul.

Jesus did not care for any such rich dinner as Martha was preparing; she misjudged his taste; he had other meat to eat and cared more for Mary's sympathetic presence and meditative mood than for Martha's bustling preparation and highly-spiced dishes.

Outward service for Christ, the temporalities of the church that adorn his house and, so to speak, set a fine table for him, good as they are in their place, are of small value in his sight compared with the spirit in his disciples that brings them into full fellowship with him.

However active life may be in service, though it be overflowing with labors, yet it is a poor and pitiful life if it is simply burdened

and distracted with the petty cares of the home and business, of the world and even of the church, and lacks the one thing needful.

5. The One Thing Needful

What was this one thing that lifts all other things up into divine worth and beauty? It is the good part which Mary chose; and she chose to sit at Jesus' feet and hear his words.

She sat at his feet in a threefold relation: Jesus was her Teacher, her Friend, and her Saviour, and these may be said to be the three greatest blessings in the world.

A teacher gives us a new thought, a richer mind, and this is something beyond price. Jesus is the Teacher at whose feet we may sit and learn the most splendid thoughts of God that lift our lives towards the stars.

A friend gives us fellowship and affection, and Jesus is the Friend "above all others," whose fellowship and love will satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts.

A Saviour is needed to cleanse away our sin and impart unto us eternal life, and Jesus only has this power on earth.

Without such a Teacher and Friend and Saviour how low and petty and sordid are all the pursuits and passions of this life! They are simply the "many things" that distract and trouble us.

But give us the "one thing needful," let us sit at the feet of Jesus as our Teacher and Friend and Lord, and his Spirit in us will transform and transfigure them into purity and peace and power. And this good part shall never be taken away from us.

Such was the conduct of Jesus among his friends, and the remaining part of the lesson is instructive as it shows us how Jesus spoke plain and pointed truth when among his foes.

LESSON XIII.—DECEMBER 24

A LESSON IN TRUST AND PREPAREDNESS

True Riches

Golden Text: The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Luke, 12:23.

Devotional Reading: Luke, 12:22–31.

Reference Material: Matt. 6:25–33.

Lesson Text: Luke, 12:16–31

16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:
17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?
18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.
19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry.
20 But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?
21 So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.
22 ¶ And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.
23 The life is more than meat, and the body *is more* than raiment.
24 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn: and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?
25 And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?
26 If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?
27 Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
28 If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more *will he clothe* you, O ye of little faith?
29 And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.
30 For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.
31 ¶ But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. *Why the Rich Man Was a Fool: Negative Reasons.*
2. *Why the Rich Man Was a Fool: Positive Reasons.*
3. *A Quotation from Nature.*
4. *The Kingdom First.*

A great concourse of people was gathered before Jesus and he was delivering to them a solemn sermon on some of the fundamental laws of the kingdom. While he was preaching a man in the audience was thinking of something else.

People often are thinking of something else while the preacher is preaching. Worldy cares and ambitions may thrust themselves into our richest opportunities and finest moods, and earth may crowd out heaven.

This man spoke up and said, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." He had a personal grievance which he wished the preacher to settle, but Jesus declined the task with the sharp rebuke, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" The Saviour was not in the world to correct wrongs in this way.

Having dismissed this case Jesus went on with the sermon, only this interruption gave a new turn to his discourse and led him to preach against the sin of covetousness that was the real root of the trouble between the two brothers. "Take heed," he said, "and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

1. Why the Rich Man Was a Fool: Negative Reasons

This is the text of a powerful sermon in the form of a parable. We are shown a picture of a successful farmer, whose wealth is growing until his barns are bursting, and he knows not how to store his harvests. He solves the problem by resolving to tear down his barns and build larger ones, and then he will rest, eat, drink and be merry.

But God called this man a fool and declared that that very night his soul was required of him; and then his wealth was scattered by other hands.

The parable fits many a modern business man without a wrinkle. We see him succeeding in business until he knows not how to invest his accumulating capital. He branches out into many lines of trade and owns large blocks of stocks and bonds.

He dreams of days of retirement when he will rest in ease and pleasure, but

these days never come, for amidst his planning and toiling for larger wealth he suddenly drops out of the world and his estate is divided and scattered.

This man is the envy of others who applaud him for his brilliant success, but this is the man whom God calls a fool. It is an unexpected and harsh word in the parable, but Jesus always picked his words carefully and meant just what he said.

Why was this man a fool? We may first note some negative reasons. He was not a fool in mental imbecility or inability. He was not born with a disordered brain or a weak mind, but had keen mental faculties, and his education had not been neglected. He understood his business thoroughly and knew all about markets and prices and profits.

The successful business man of to-day is always a man of intellectual gifts and training. He often has a diploma from a high-grade college and is the peer of professional men. A great capitalist and captain of modern industry controlling millions of money and world-wide markets, must be a man of commanding ability. The man that succeeds in the keen competition of to-day is no fool mentally.

And this man was not a fool in moral weakness and viciousness. He was not a spendthrift, or lazy idler, or prodigal pleasure seeker, or he would never have got rich. He had no vices, and was an eminently moral and respectable man among men.

The successful man in business is nearly always such a man. Morality is one of the laws of business, and a man must be moral to succeed. Vice unfits a man for business and will soon put him out of it.

Again, this man was not a fool because he was rich. The parable is commonly called "the rich fool," but God did not call him a rich fool but simply a fool.

There is nothing wrong in being rich, provided the riches are obtained and used in right ways.

Riches imply ability and industry, so that men of large wealth are likely to be men of uncommon wisdom and productivity rather than men of unusual folly. Wealth honestly gained is an honor to a man as it bears witness to his usefulness and worth, and no man can honestly get rich without helping other men to get rich also and thereby adding to the wealth of the world.

This was a man, then, of mental ability and moral character and of honest wealth, an apparently model man, and yet notwithstanding

all this God called him a fool; and such in the sight of God may be the real standing and character of many a successful man among us.

2. Why the Rich Man Was a Fool: Positive Reasons

Why, then, was this man a fool? First, because of his selfishness. Not knowing what to do with the abundance of his increasing goods, he never thought of them in any other light than as the means of his own gratification. He never saw beyond "my barns" and "my goods" into his neighbor's need.

Wealth was never to him a means of social service, but was always and only for his personal enjoyment. Such misuse of one's powers and possessions is selfishness and blindness that brand a man as a fool in the sight of God.

Closely related to this as a second element in his folly was his gross materialism. His only thought of life was to rest, eat, drink and be jolly. He had no higher aspiration than ease and gratification in which every physical appetite was satisfied and satiated. Truth and duty, sympathy and service and sacrifice were visions that never visited his sky. He was content to live on a level with the beasts and virtually fed upon husks that swine eat.

A life in which the spirit is thus sunk in the flesh is a pitiful prostitution of all our high and noble powers, and he that is content to live such a life is a fool.

Deeper still, this man was a fool because he had no faith in and fellowship with God. "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." He was rich in this world's goods and thought that he had need of nothing, but he was poor and blind and naked in his soul.

He had never found his heavenly Father by faith and entered into a life of fellowship with him. Sin had never been cleansed out of his heart, and his soul had not been harmonized into peace with God. No heavenly vision burned above him to coax and woo him on and up to higher things. Life with him was a mere matter of eating and drinking, and death was a leap into the dark.

He said in his heart, either explicitly or else implicitly, "There is no God," and such a man is a fool. A selfish, materialistic, godless life, then, constitutes one a fool in the sight of heaven. Such fools are not rare in our modern world.

The wonderful increase of wealth in our day when all barns are bursting and men are constantly planning larger enterprises and heaping up enormous glittering piles of gold and goods, is intensifying life on its materialistic side. Covetousness is the master motive of many, and in increasing multitudes men are thinking that life consists in the abundance of things which they possess.

Life is measured by things and not by thoughts, by gold and not by grace. We are thus in danger of groveling in the earth and growing blind to the sky.

Such gain overbalanced by such loss is a bad bargain. What shall it profit us if we thus gain the whole world and then lose our own soul? Though it may make us rich and envied in the sight of men, yet such a life draws upon us the divine judgment, "Thou fool!"

3. A Quotation from Nature

At this point Jesus illustrates his point and embroiders his sermon with a quotation from nature. Standing in the great auditorium and amphitheater of the earth and sky he quotes the ravens soaring overhead and made the telling application, "How much more are ye better than the fowls?"

Next he called attention to lilies blooming around: they do not weary and worry themselves with toil, and fretting does not spoil their serenity and beauty; and then, pointing to one blossom, he declared that even Solomon, the most splendid figure in Jewish history, in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Again the application followed with resistless logic, "How much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

These illustrations make vivid the fact that the world is a system of law and of love in which no atom slips out of place, every instinct is mated with its appropriate end, and provision is made for every living creature.

The bird finds the air waiting for its wings and nuts and berries ripening for its food. Its life is tuned to music, and it seeks its mate and builds its nest and rears its brood and sings its life away.

The flower pushes its green stem up through the earth to find air and shower and sunshine and all the stars, the whole solar system and universe, ready to minister to it and clothe it with gorgeous garments of white and scarlet and gold. When we look upon the beautiful order of nature and bathe our senses

in its perfection, we cannot but think, spite of its pains and terrors, that it is saturated with intelligence and palpitates with love.

Will God arrange the world for birds and flowers and forget his human children? Shall the instinct of the bee find the flower that matches its need, and the cry of the human heart for a Father die away unheeded?

Man refuses to believe in such an irrational world and sees in all the arrangements of nature a profound appeal to our trust in our heavenly Father.

If we are true to his laws, as are the birds and the flowers, the whole world will wait on us, our Father shall feed and clothe us, and our lives, also free from fretful care, shall be set to music. "He guides me and the bird."

4. The Kingdom First

The Saviour completes his argument and appeal at this point with the exhortation, "But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you."

It is a law of life that things differ in relative worth and importance and that first things should come first. The foundation should be laid down before walls are erected, and solid construction is more important than showy ornamentation. In planting a tree it is of the first importance to get the right seed or root, for this foreordains every branch and leaf and bud and fruit that will grow out of it.

The kingdom of God in the heart is of the first and supreme importance from every point of view. This is the foundation that determines the whole structure of life, the center that puts every point on the entire circumference at the right place.

Get this root first in the heart, and then all things else will come right in body and soul, business and estate, character and circumstances, time and eternity. This will crowd out worry and turn all life into purity and peace and song.

LESSON XIV.—DECEMBER 31

REVIEW: JESUS THE WORLD'S SAVIOUR

Some Characteristics of Jesus' Ministry

Golden Text: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor. Luke, 4:18.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 98.

PLAN OF REVIEW

Introduction.
1. Early Years.
2. Opening of the Ministry.
3. Healer and Teacher.
4. The Missionary.
5. Parables.
6. The Social Gospel.

In this quarter we have been studying the Life of all lives the most perfect and wonderful, the central and supreme Light of the world. Our study has been a series of views or pictures of this Life as it is portrayed in the Gospel of Luke, which has been called "the most beautiful book in the world." We shall gather up and condense the main points in these lessons.

1. Early Years

Every great man must have forerunners to prepare the way for his coming, as the soil must be prepared for the seed. John the Baptist was the herald of the coming Messiah and nobly did he fulfill this high office. His pious ancestry was the root of his Puritan personality and character, and so important was his coming that an angel visitant announced it.

This first angel announcement began with the comforting assurance, "Fear not!" and this note runs all through the gospel. The forerunner was assigned to a great place by the angel, and yet "he was not that Light," but only the morning star that heralded the coming of the "Sun of righteousness."

The birth of Jesus followed in due time and we saw him grow in the home after the manner of normal human growth. His first visit to the temple in Jerusalem marked an epoch in his life, and his mother was troubled by the sign of his attainment of personality and responsibility.

Such an experience usually comes to parents, but it is necessary in human development.

One of the most wonderful facts recorded in the life of Jesus is that he came to Nazareth with his parents "and was subject unto them." Such subjection is no harsh restriction but wise and loving discipline that prepares for the full liberty of mature life. Jesus "went before" us at every point and set us a perfect example of perfect childhood.

The religious training of the young is one of the most vital and far-reaching duties that rests upon each generation, as it literally determines the conscience and character of the next generation.

2. Opening of the Ministry

The ministry of Jesus was opened appropriately with a great revival meeting down in the Jordan valley where a striking preacher of strange appearance was delivering a burning message.

The crowds poured down the steep roads to hear him, for nothing will draw like religion when it is efficiently presented. John the Baptist was a bold soul who had found the truth himself and poured it out as irresistibly and fearlessly as a volcano emits its flood of lava.

The central burning word in his fiery message was repentance, for thorns must be cleared away before the good seed can be planted.

This message of repentance is just as much needed in our day as it was in that ancient time. John's sermons wrought conviction, which is the proof of all preaching.

Yet his work was attended with the great temptation to introduce himself instead of the coming One, but he resisted this fatal proposal and stood out of the way and presently out of sight that the Messiah might stand forth. Jesus was manifested as the Messiah first in his baptism and then in his temptation in which he met the suggestions that accompanied his full realization of his consciousness as the Son of God.

These temptations were cunning and powerful assaults of Satan designed to throw him off his balance and lead him to pervert his divine power to personal and selfish uses. To turn stones into bread, to leap from the temple into popularity, to look upon the dazzling vision of the whole world as a short cut to the kingdom to be gained by one little act of worship—how powerfully these must have appealed to Jesus?

And yet he instantly beat back and destroyed each of them in turn by his appeal to Scripture, "It is written."

The truth of Scripture, the law of the Lord was so wrought into his soul that all these fiery darts fell quenched and harmless at his feet. His soul remained unspotted white, while the devil fled beaten into the darkness whence he came. As Jesus conquered, so may we, for still "it is written."

3. Healer and Teacher

Jesus taught by example as well as by word, and the healing of the paralytic is a fine and full example of the way salvation works.

The disease of paralysis is a striking illustration of the nature and effects of sin, for sin paralyzes both body and soul.

The coöperation of human help in bringing the sinner to the Saviour is beautifully exemplified by the four faithful friends who carried their helpless friend on his bed to the place where Jesus was. They were blocked in their path, for there are obstructions in the way of all good ends and even the road to salvation has its hindrances.

Yet these men had good stuff in them and would not give up and be stopped but found a way to overcome the difficulty. Their way was bold and unconventional and possibly encountered criticism and even ridicule, but they did not mind this as they carried their friend up to the flat roof and let him down through a hole they had torn in it to the feet of Jesus.

He did the healing by the word of his power, and then to convince the hostile scribes he told the man to arise and walk, and he took up his bed and walked home.

Such is salvation as it works to-day in healing palsied people.

After this picture of Jesus the Healer we are given a companion pict ire of Jesus the Teacher. Instruction has ever been a vital part of rational religion, and doctrine must ever precede duty. Jesus was a doctrinal preacher, only

he made doctrine so clear and simple and interesting that the common people flocked to hear him gladly.

Our lesson on this point is a section of the Sermon on the Mount in which we are taught to love our enemies, which is a difficult thing to do but is of the essence of the Christian spirit.

The Golden Rule is presented and we are to transmute it into the gold of a just and generous spirit and life. Mercy is urged upon us as a special application of the Golden Rule carried to its limit.

The matter of judging others is a very important factor in our social relations and daily life. A sharp tongue is a very ugly and evil thing, but gracious speech is a beautiful accomplishment and fine art, and a word fitly spoken is like an apple of gold in a basket of silver.

The deeply suggestive lesson on "Jesus the Friend of Sinners" is a beautiful illustration of how Jesus combined spiritual healing with pointed instruction.

4. The Missionary

Jesus as a Missionary is the subject of two lessons. His advent from heaven into this world was itself the supreme missionary movement and enterprise.

We are first given a view of his work as a missionary as he went over into the country of the Gadarenes, which was in a degree a foreign country as these people were of mixed if not of foreign blood. A cry for help from a pitiable creature appealed to him as soon as he stepped on the shore, and we see another picture of what sin does in the human body and soul.

Jesus had power over such evil spirits and cast them out by a word; and he has the same power of casting out evil spirits from our souls and society and world, and this work has been going on through the Christian centuries. Has not the devil of strong drink been cast out in no small degree in our own country?

Unexpected consequences followed this merciful act of casting out evil spirits, for the devils entered a herd of swine and set them crazy as they did the possessed man, even as liquor will make even hogs drunk. When the swine rushed down into the sea, their owners came out, and when they realized the loss of their swine they ordered Jesus out of their country.

They did not want a Saviour that saved men at the expense of pigs, and this ground of opposition to the gospel assumes many forms and still operates in the world.

In another lesson we find Jesus sending out his own disciples as missionaries. We first are to come to Jesus to receive his salvation and then we are to go from him to carry it to others. We are saved to serve, and this principle should underlie and shape all our Christian life.

Disciples must receive instructions and the Master gave them many wise and shrewd directions as to their personal conduct. Even their table manners were not beneath the notice and advice of Jesus.

Their work was to begin with healing the sick as concrete and visible manifestations of the gospel and then was to present the supreme subject of the kingdom of God.

If their message was rejected they were to depart and go elsewhere, for on their brief tour there was not time to enter into slow patient work.

It is encouraging to read that they came back in a joyful spirit over their success, and we have many encouragements to spur us on in our work.

5. Parables

The parable was one of the most popular and effective means of teaching that Jesus used in his ministry. This was a picturesque way of presenting truth, and most people dearly love stories. We have in these lessons two of the most striking and instructive of his parables.

The Good Samaritan is a noble illustration of the Christian spirit. Every point in the story brings out the selfishness of the Jews and the generosity and sympathy and sacrifice of the Samaritan, a man whom the Jews hated as a heretic and heathen.

Priest and Levite had no help for a wounded man who had no money, even though he were a Jew; and so they passed him by on the other side, a thing we can slyly do in our day just as unconcernedly as they did in their day.

But the Samaritan took just as much interest in the unconscious and bleeding Jew as though he were his own brother. He instantly put that man in his own place and provided for him in all things.

In vain do we call ourselves Christians if we pass people of other classes and conditions and races by; then will heathen men rise up in the judgment and condemn us.

The other parable in our lesson is that of the Rich Fool, which fits closely into our modern life. This holds a mirror up to our love of wealth and of

heaping it up in great accumulations and treasuring it for our own comfort and ease and ostentation and pride.

This danger has greatly increased in our day when wealth is so much more abundant and conspicuous and excites envy and sets all the world mad in the race for it.

We are just as big fools as the rich man in the parable if we set our heart on riches rather than on the kingdom of God. If we get the kingdom first all other good things shall be added to us in their due time and proportion.

6. The Social Gospel

The social gospel is now much in evidence in our teaching and church work, and this is well, provided we do not push it to excessive emphasis.

These lessons show us, what we have known all along, that the social gospel is no new thing but is the very gospel Jesus himself preached and applied, and we have also seen in earlier lessons during the year that the social gospel goes back to the preaching of the Hebrew prophets. There really can be no gospel that is not social, for we are intensely social beings and all our religious doctrines and duties are social.

These lessons from the life of Jesus are pervaded throughout with this spirit and service. The Golden Rule is the very core and essence of this gospel, and all we need do is to glance along the list of the titles of the lessons of the quarter to see that they are all forms of this gospel.

John the Baptist shot the social gospel straight into the bosoms of his hearers as he adapted it to various classes and conditions, and Jesus as Physician and Teacher and Missionary and in all his miracles and parables was presenting and applying the social gospel.

If we have his spirit and follow his example in our teaching and work we shall know no other gospel and shall live and apply it in all our lives.

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